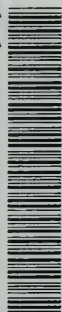


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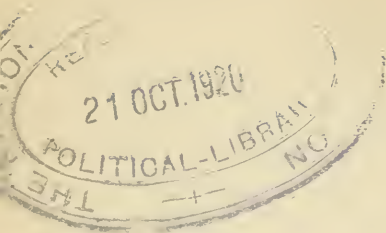
# THE POLITICAL RE-ORGANISATION OF THE PEOPLE

BY  
WILLIAM SANDERS



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THE most notable features in English politics [during the last few years have been the rapid growth of the movement for the formation of a third party from among the working-classes which are already organised for trade union and other purposes; and, concurrently, the rapid decay of the influence of the Liberal party. The chief object of the following pages is to indicate some of the difficulties and problems which will have to be overcome before the advocates of the movement for the establishment of a third political group can attain their end.

The point of view adopted is that of a collectivist and democrat whose enthusiasm has been tempered by an intimate and practical experience of the work of political organisation among the working-classes.

The subject matter is drawn mainly from a course of lectures delivered under the auspices of the Union of Ethical Societies during the autumn of 1901.

WILLIAM SANDERS.

BATTERSEA, *May*, 1902.

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# The Political Re-organisation of the People

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: THE POLITICAL SITUATION

DURING the last twenty years several attempts have been made to form a third political party from among the masses of England. This task has been generally held to be an impossible one, and the experience of those who have made efforts in this direction during the period mentioned seems to prove the correctness of this view. The tradition that two parties, and two parties only, have always existed, and therefore, according to a common habit of reasoning, must always exist, has been a powerful means of stifling all tendencies towards a development of political activity independent of either the Liberal or Conservative parties. Thus we find that Radical agitators and reformers of the latter portion of the last century made no strong effort to form a separate

organisation but contented themselves with the position of being the left wing of Liberalism, and trusted to permeation from within to secure the adoption by the party of the reforms they advocated. This policy, as far as the past is concerned, can, to a great extent, be justified. The opportunism of English politicians has been successfully exploited in the interests of democratic progress and reform. Whenever public opinion has been aroused thoroughly upon any question of importance, party leaders have been found ready to make it a party matter and to provide a solution. This method of securing the confidence of the people, and thereby obtaining or retaining power, has been common to Liberal and Conservative statesmen alike in practically all spheres of reform, whether purely political or entirely social. The endeavour that is sometimes made to give to the Liberal party the sole credit of obtaining political rights for the people, and to their opponents that of securing the most valuable pieces of social reform, is not in strict accord with the history of legislation. The first great franchise Reform—that of 1832—having been carried by the Whigs, and its results proving by no means disastrous to the power of either the rich or privileged classes, both parties have considered it safe to be amenable to popular pressure, and have been readily convinced of the reasonableness of the demands on the part of the masses for further instalments of political and social rights. This has been so characteristic of

the attitude of both parties with regard to nearly all important matters that have been before the country during the last decade, that the distinctions between Liberalism and Conservatism are now difficult to define. The boundaries between the two are blurred and confused. The Liberals placed local government in the areas without the cities and larger towns upon a clear and uniform basis ; their antagonists did the same for the metropolis by sweeping away a complex and corrupt tangle of municipal administration, and substituting the London County Council and the recently created Metropolitan Borough Councils. The workers have secured from both parties employers' liability acts and factory legislation ; and if they have to thank the Liberals for a national system of elementary education, the Conservatives can claim their gratitude for freeing them from the irksome method of direct contribution towards its cost. Until 1880 there was an intermittent contest between the two parties as to which should be foremost in widening the franchise, and we find in 1900 that a Conservative Government was so convinced of the value of a democratic electorate in municipal politics that it instituted the broadest existing franchise in England for both the London County Council and the London Borough Councils. These examples of competition in reform, which could be added to considerably, afford some explanation and justification for the absence of a third independent, democratic, or radical section of much influence in English politics.

There has been, however, one striking difference between Liberalism and Conservatism in the past which must be noted. When an active group of advanced politicians have agitated for a reform, and through their agitation interested a certain amount of educated public opinion in its favour, they have generally found help among the Liberal leaders in further propaganda. In a word, the Liberal party has retained for so long its position as the popular or democratic party owing to the fact that it attempted to be, and sometimes was, an educational party, occasionally in advance of public opinion, and relying for success at the polls chiefly upon its capacity to convince the people of the necessity of reform. Its last great leader, or better, its last leader, for since his death there has been none, was not only a statesman but an agitator in the highest sense of the word. The Conservatives, on the other hand, have, as a rule, waited passively until opinion ripened through the exertions of their opponents; and when in power have passed the measures the country has most urgently demanded, even when this policy was in direct contradiction to their declared principles.

The capacity on the part of the Liberal party to create an effective demand for democratic progress has been largely dependent upon the personality of its leaders, and their ability to discover and voice those measures of which the people had already, if only vaguely, felt the necessity. This capacity is now no longer confined to it. The Conservatives



can no longer be held to deserve the taunt of being the stupid party. They have been leavened to no small extent by the Liberal Unionists, whose leader, no matter how shallow a statesman he may be, has a trained faculty for discerning the drift of popular ideas, and adapting his course of action to it. On the other hand, the Liberals have lost in great measure their talent for reading the signs of the times. They have staked their fates at the polls upon questions in which the people were but little interested, or owing to the absence of well-organised propaganda, took a diametrically opposite view. This was glaringly evident at the election of 1895, when Liberalism suffered the defeat which has left it hopeless and disorganised.

The derelict condition of the party cannot be considered as a temporary phenomenon which will disappear as circumstances readjust themselves. The decay which set in after the retirement of Mr. Gladstone from office has been spreading year by year, and there are no signs that it will be arrested. There is, indeed, vitality in certain of its sections, but this vitality is helping on the work of destruction. The questions above all others upon which the country desired a united democratic pronouncement—the war in South Africa and the Imperial problems which have come to the front through that struggle—have been a further source of division and distrust. The Imperialist and anti-Imperialist groups bid fair to fight each other to the

death in order to make a reactionary holiday. Appeals to sink differences, and variations played upon old party phrases such as the urgency of Peace, Retrenchment and Reform, fail to bring unity or obedience to discipline. The party remains an aggregation of contending atoms unable to effectively oppose in Parliament, or to win the confidence of the people outside.

The waning influence of Liberalism upon the masses is to be traced in the main to a growing belief that its leading representatives are not sincere in their expressed desire for reform. The feeling is abroad that they are desirous of marking time not only in social but also in political legislation. For instance, thinking men among the working classes are constantly reminded that their choice of parliamentary representatives is limited owing to the heavy expenses of elections, which must be defrayed by the candidate, and by the absence of payment of members. These two obstacles to the selection of candidates unendowed with long purses renders the House of Commons a preserve for the rich which can be entered by a poor man only under the most exceptional circumstances. He must either be a man of striking individuality or the paid official of a trade-union chosen not so much on account of his all-round capacity as a politician, but as a representative of, and combatant for, special sectional working-class interests. The Liberal party has made professions in favour of removing these two dis-

abilities, but no effort has followed these professions, even after the House of Commons had declared itself to be converted to the proposal to pay members a reasonable sum for their services. Reform of the present complicated and absurd system of franchise has been promised, but with the exception of the abortive bill that was laid before the House in the last year of office of the party, nothing tangible has resulted. The House of Lords, in spite of threats of mending or ending, remains with all its undemocratic obstructive power, a permanent check to all proposals for reform which are not backed up by earnest, strenuous insistence by those who advocate them. A long-standing item in the programme of some prominent Liberals is that this state of things should be remedied. Nothing definite, however, either in word or act has followed.

In the field of social legislation a record of a very similar nature is to be read. The trail of Manchester *laissez-faire* is still over official Liberalism in spite of the attempts at socialistic permeation which have been carried on during the past fifteen years. "We are all socialists now," said Sir William Harcourt fifteen years ago, when it seemed as if the Radical element, enthused by the new spirit of that time, had gained a guiding influence in the party counsels. But this declaration has remained practically an empty phrase. The London County Council has been in existence twelve years. During that time it has worked a great change in the minds of the

people of London with regard to their rights and duties as citizens, and has brought into prominence the marvellous development of municipal activity not only in the metropolis but all over the kingdom. It has created a school of municipal statesmen who have made clear the vast opportunities that exist in local self-government for benefiting the community. The left wing of Liberalism has shown sympathy with this activity, and advocated the granting of wider powers for the purpose of grappling with civic problems that remain unsolved. But the leaders on the front bench have taken up a Laodicean attitude on these matters. In power they remained cold and indifferent; in opposition they have made spasmodic unsustained efforts to display a cordial interest. London, bound hand and foot by monopolies which exploit her unmercifully in all directions, is still waiting for the official Liberal municipal programme. So far are we, however, from receiving such a document that would encourage the collective spirit, which is the most promising sign of modern progress, that we find front bench Liberals supporting the appointment of a Parliamentary Committee to inquire into the scope and methods of municipal trading and enterprise, obviously incited to this action through the fear that county, town, and district councils, through the natural growth of their functions, are trespassing upon the domain hitherto sacred to capitalism. The object of the originators of the Committee, which was to obtain, if possible,

sufficient evidence to warrant legislative interference with communal development, did not succeed. On the contrary, a complete armory of facts has been collected which will be of the greatest use to the advocate of municipal socialism. But this does not hide the fact that the Liberal party is divided on this question, as on the others already mentioned.

It has been contended that the sorry condition of Liberalism is due to causes over which its leaders have no control; that the policy of waiting and hoping, instead of acting, has been forced upon them by the attitude of the people who refuse to show any enthusiasm for reforms of any kind. But it has already been pointed out that the duty of a party claiming to be founded upon a democratic theory of politics must educate and lead the people. The masses know that they suffer; they have a notion that something wants doing and that rapidly. But they are incapable alone of finding out what are the actual causes of the wrongs they bear, or how they are to be removed. This should be the work, as far as politics is concerned, of the party which associates itself with ideas of democratic reform. Such a party must educate, agitate, and organise if it really desires to carry a reform programme into effect. It must stir up a spirit of enthusiasm and confidence among its followers by laying down clearly and unmistakably the line it intends to follow. It must create issues, and not wait until some chance cry, which attracts attention for a time, appears to give a clue to the

policy which, if advocated, will result in obtaining place and power. Since the culmination of the Home Rule agitation, no attempt has been made on a grand scale by the Liberal party, as such, to arouse the people on any of the many public questions which demand attention. Whatever has been done in this direction has been the work of either a few so-called extreme Radicals or the leaders of the modern labour and socialist movement. It has been left to such men as these to advocate seriously even minor political reforms which are usually considered to be the peculiar stock-in-trade of orthodox Liberalism. Besides the political changes which have been demanded on and off for the last fifty years, and still remain to be accomplished, a quite new series of problems has arisen to which the Liberal party has no solution to offer. These problems are of a social character, and require careful attention in order to master them. To mention one only—the treatment of the aged poor. The present Government has been accused, perhaps rightly, of securing support by a half promise to provide State Old Age pensions, and of then quietly dropping the matter when its electoral purpose had been served. This piece of bad faith has been held up before the electors again and again by the Opposition as a monstrous instance of cruel political trickery at the expense of a class that requires immediate relief ; but we have yet to receive from a responsible Liberal statesman a suggestion of a satisfactory scheme, or even a favourable recognition of those put forward by men



like Mr. Charles Booth, who have devoted themselves to a thorough study of the problem, and who possess expert knowledge. The same timidity or want of sympathy has been shown towards other urgent reforms where energetic and courageous action is wanted. The educational machinery of the country has been in need of renovation and readjustment for many years. The necessity of taking steps to establish a system, both democratic and organic, has been repeatedly urged from many quarters. But it was not until it appeared likely that the present muddle was to be made worse that we find any attempt being made by the Liberals to rouse the country upon the question. And even the fight made in 1901 in the House of Commons to maintain the present powers and constitution of School Boards, which, whatever may be the demerits of these bodies, was a struggle for democratic control, the motive power came from without, and party leaders had to be almost coerced into action by the people, who, according to the former, cannot be stirred upon any issue.

In the sphere of Imperial politics, Liberalism, through its indefiniteness and neglect, has enabled reaction to associate with the idea of Empire a policy of conquest and domination. Probably there is no being in existence who embodies the ideas of Little Englandism which the Conservative politician holds to be the opinions of the majority of the Liberal party. But at the same time, it cannot be denied that the want of a proper appreciation of the responsibilities

and possibilities of the British Empire, shown by the Liberals, has given their opponents the opportunity of securing the advantage of seeming to be the genuine patriotic party. Too late a section has awakened to the necessity of endeavouring to lay down some sort of Imperial policy, but its weak platitudes, which are nothing more than feeble echoes of Jingoistic utterances, have all the faults of imitation without the virtue of sincerity possessed by the originals.

This faint-heartedness and despair, which displays itself in a Micawber-like attitude of waiting for something to turn up, or a hopeless wringing of hands over the apathy of the masses; this absence of educational propaganda of a definite programme; this want of unity and discipline, all point to the fact that Liberalism as a creed and as a basis for an effective party is rapidly dying. It contains no message for the present or the future. Its representatives appeal to the people for support on account of its past record, but they offer no evidence that they would be able to put that support to good use. The lack of constructive statesmanship shown by the Liberal leaders was undoubtedly one of the main reasons that induced the electorate in 1900 to return the Conservatives once more to power with almost the same majority they previously possessed. It was not so much the liking for Conservatism as the distrust of the capacity of the Liberals to do anything, even to form a government, which brought



about that result. The lower middle class and the workers left without guidance, or puzzled and misled by the indefinite and contradictory positions taken up by the Liberals on the main issues of the hour, deserted largely to the other side, with the result that the industrial centres, where the masses are strongest in numbers, seem now to be the greatest strongholds of reaction.

The fundamental cause of the remarkable situation in which Liberalism finds itself is that it has achieved its work and exhausted its mandate. It has wrested the power of government from the hands of the landed aristocracy and transferred it to the aristocracy of capital, who, satisfied with the position they have secured, are desirous of no further change. Hence we find that the wealthy classes as a whole have gone over to the opposite camp, and have placed their riches and influence at its service. This was made evident a short time since, by the declaration of Mr. Herbert Gladstone that for every pound available for Liberal propaganda and organisation, probably a hundred was at the disposal of the Conservative party for similar purposes. The men of wealth and influence still left to Liberalism have no wish to give it new life by grafting on to the old a new democratic programme that would rally the masses round them. In party politics those who pay the piper usually call the tune, and we have the right to assume that the feeble character of the latest party programme agreed upon at Bradford in

1900, as compared with the more vigorous document drawn up at Newcastle some years ago, is due to the attitude of the holders of the purse-strings. They hope to again attract the middle class by a display of moderation which will allay their fears that the party has been captured by the extreme socialistic Radicals. Should such an improbable contingency arise, we should possibly see another movement across the floor of the House of Commons like the one which took place after the introduction of the first Home Rule proposals. The formation of the Imperialist section gives some ground for the belief that a second exodus is not unlikely should the terms offered by the other side prove sufficiently inviting. In fact, there are several leading Liberals who, on other questions besides that of the war, find themselves more in harmony with their conventional opponents than with their present friends.

Thus, when we make a general survey of the whole political field from a democratic standpoint, the prospect seems cheerless and disheartening. We are not merely standing still, we are fast moving backwards. Ten years ago there was a lively hope abroad that we had entered a new era of reform. Everywhere there was a spirit of confidence in a rapid advance towards a new order. The workers, aroused to a strong sense of the need for organisation, hastened to build up what has been called the New Unionism—a movement which has done much to give a new status to the so-called

unskilled labourer, hitherto the despair of his fellow-workers. A revival of interest in the duties of citizenship was displayed by reformers who, imbued with an enthusiasm for the welfare of the cities in which they lived, devoted themselves to the work of uplifting and brightening the lives of the people by collective effort. Labour appeared to have secured a position, through its organisations, strong enough to enable it to meet capital on a more equal footing. The possibility of forming a powerful and definite Labour party which should in political action supplement the work done for the masses by the trade unions and the co-operative movements was considered to be hopeful. But since that time there has been an almost overwhelming wave of reaction. Temporary prosperity gradually sapped the zeal for progress which had been awakened among the working classes. Their leaders, who had believed that educational agitation could be safely dropped in order that practical work might be undertaken, found that they had been mistaken in the estimate of the influence they had obtained over their followers, and of the capacity of the masses to remain constant to new ideas. A firm, sound method of political organisation was lacking, and only here and there throughout the country have the working classes remained steadfast to the new ideals of democratic progress.

One of the most striking results of this reaction has been the loss of practically all the power to use effectively the force of trade combination which has

been one of the chief means whereby the workers have improved their social position. It is more than a coincidence that now capital as a political and economic force is organising itself with a thoroughness that is impossible for the masses to emulate, a series of legal decisions totally at variance with past judgments has rendered trade unionism almost impotent. The House of Lords has decided that, under certain circumstances, strikes and the methods usually adopted by workmen engaged in them are illegal; and further, that the unions which up till now have been held to be without the legal standing of a corporation can be declared financially responsible for such illegalities. Mr. Frederic Harrison, whose knowledge of the subject is unrivalled, and to whom the workers of this country owe much on account of his efforts to secure for them the right of combination, has emphatically expressed the view that the workers are now completely at the mercy of the employers; that all means to active resistance against attempts to reduce wages or otherwise to take away the improvements that have been secured by much self-sacrifice and self-discipline have vanished. There are differences of opinion as to the exact value of trade unions from a universal standpoint. There are many modern political economists, however, who will not only allow that the existence of trade unions has benefited the working classes, but will also acknowledge that they have rendered valuable service to the community by helping towards the solution of grave social problems. They have aided

in the work of bringing into industrial anarchy some semblance of order, and have latterly shown signs of making peace in industry more permanent. Therefore their reduction to helplessness is a matter of grave national concern. What steps should be taken to give them a new strength will be discussed later. It is clear that their old status cannot be revived. The only way that some measure of their former effectiveness can be secured to them is through political action, and such action, if it is to be of real service, must be undertaken on independent lines. The Liberal party has no solution to offer. Its ranks contain no man of prominence who will take up the problem and force the party to undertake to solve it.

It is this absence of strong personalities in the Liberal party—a matter constantly lamented by its press—that makes it all the more possible and imperative that a new party should be formed which shall stand for a democratic ideal. To try to carry on the policy of permeation any longer is useless. The outcome would be to permeate the party into further sections, each anxious to secure the recognition of its little piece of proposed reform, and with no man powerful enough to enforce unity on any of them. The result of the permeation policy can be seen clearly enough in connection with the recent disputes over the settlement of the official platform with regard to the war in South Africa. Add to the present difficulties by agitating within the party for

further powers to be given to municipalities to own and control monopolies in the interest of the community, and the enemies of collective enterprise will be found actively opposing such proposals, and prophesying the break-up of Liberalism altogether if it is committed to collectivism, however mild the type may be. Franchise reforms are not likely to meet with any sympathy, for the country displays no interest in them ; social reforms will receive scant attention, because they will mean heavy expenditure, and we are aware that the war will leave us with a depleted exchequer, a heavy debt and largely increased permanent charges, that will render it impossible for the ordinary politician to suggest a means of defraying the cost, say, of Old Age pensions. Indeed, to endeavour to get the party to take up definitely any of the points of a programme which would represent the need of the time, and to carry out a campaign of education and agitation for the purpose of creating a popular movement behind them, would be wasting valuable energy that should be devoted to making the masses conscious of those needs, and organising them in such a manner that they could rely upon their own strength to secure the required reforms.

The argument which has been often used, and with success, against such an enterprise, that it will tend to give reaction a still firmer hold upon the reins of power by weakening an existing check upon it without securing a counterbalancing advantage in return, is without weight at this juncture of our history. We

have seen that the Liberals are utterly powerless as an opposition ; their feebleness and futility have disgusted the people to such an extent that their return to power within a measurable period is, even under ordinary circumstances, exceedingly doubtful. The suggestion emanating from the Imperialist section that the party should not take office unless it obtains a majority in the House of Commons, apart from the Irish members, may be regarded as a kind of self-denying ordinance put forward for the purpose of showing a lively anticipation of the barren prospect of electoral success that lies in front. If it were possible, therefore, to create sufficient support by the next election to enable the return of several independent candidates to be secured even at the expense of the Liberals, no harm would be done, for they would oppose reaction with probably greater effect than the men they would displace.

But the work of a new party would be for a considerable period of an organising and educational rather than of a strictly electoral character. The failure of past efforts in politically organising the masses warn us of the danger of neglecting to build up a body of convinced and organised opinion before steps are taken to gain a place in legislative or administrative bodies. That side of the work must be considered, but to concentrate all efforts into the capture of a few seats in Parliament after a short term of active propaganda would be fatal to permanent growth. The programme and basis having



been agreed upon, well equipped propagandists must devote themselves, in season and out of season, to spreading them abroad. The task of the organiser will be to gather together the adherents made through this missionary work so as to prevent the energy thus expended from being wasted. To consider how this work may be accomplished is the object of the following pages. Before dealing with the future, however, it will be of value to recall the history of similar movements in the past century, commencing with the Chartist agitation.





## CHAPTER II

## CHARTISM

THE rise and fall of the Chartist Movement, which was the first definitely organised attempt in the last century to form a working-class party in politics, has yet to be described in such a manner as the subject deserves. It is full of lessons of the difficulties that lie in the way of those who endeavour to bring the masses into line on political principles ; it is also full of warnings of what to avoid and to reject in the basis and method of any new effort which may be undertaken for the same purpose.

The passing of the Reform Bill marked the first victory of the middle class over the aristocracy. The outcome of many causes, it gave the working classes some idea of the influence that could be exerted by organisation and perseverance. The measure had been carried through as the result of a long period of active agitation in which nearly all sections of society had taken part. The workers gave their time, and sometimes, as at Peterloo, their lives ; the rich and educated their money and brains. The expectations as to what was to follow the success of the Reformers

were widely different. The enemies of the Bill expected that the new electorate would use its power for the purpose of carrying through revolutionary and confiscatory legislation ; its friends awaited a regime of prosperity and social peace. Both these views proved to be illusory. No violent changes were introduced ; no attacks upon property were made by the parliament elected on the new franchise ; on the other hand, the masses found that their position showed no signs of improvement. It soon became plain that the power of government had not been transferred to the people ; it had passed out of the hands of the landed aristocracy into those of the capitalist class. According to Francis Place, the bulk of the working-class supporters of Reform were actuated chiefly by the hope that it would prepare the way for an era of socialistic legislation which would lead ultimately to a redistribution of property. Probably only the leaders were really conscious of this motive, but without doubt the basis of the popular enthusiasm for Reform was the desire for economic and social improvement. Thus we find that in 1831 the National Union of the working classes was founded, having for its object the realisation, through political enfranchisement, of the ideas of Robert Owen. This society declared its dissatisfaction with the proposals of the Whigs, but at the same time its advocacy of more democratic doctrines helped to swell the general demand for democratic change. It kept before the people the necessity of a much wider programme, and as a basis circulated

the following manifesto, which contains the chief points of what afterwards became known as the Charter. The socialist note was struck in the statement that "Labour is the source of all wealth." It then stated—

"(1) That all property honestly acquired is to be sacred and inviolable. (2) All men are born equally free, and have certain inherent and inalienable rights. (3) All governments ought to be founded on those rights, and all laws instituted for the common benefit, protection, and security of all the people, and not for the particular emolument or advantage of any single man, family, or set of men. (4) All hereditary distinctions of birth are unnatural, and are opposed to the rights of man, and therefore ought to be abolished. (5) Every man of the age of twenty-one years has a right, either by himself or by his representative, to a free voice in determining the necessity of public contributions, their appropriation, amount, mode of assessment, and duration. (6) In order to secure the unbiassed choice of proper persons for representatives, the mode of voting should be by ballot; intellectual fitness and moral truth, and not property, should be the qualification for representation; and the duration of parliaments should be for one year."

The Reform Bill fell a long way short of fulfilling the demands thus set forth. The admission to the franchise of half a million out of over five millions of adult males was a very feeble step towards democracy, as compared with the thoroughgoing

programme of the National Union set out in the language dear to the philosophers of the French Revolution of 1789. But the masses still hoped to receive some instalments of social reform. They awaited at least the protection by legal recognition of co-operative societies, and a sympathetic attitude towards trade unionism. But all the valuable help given by the workers to the Whigs seemed to be forgotten as soon as the latter had obtained their object. They were distrustful of both co-operation and of trade unionism, and professed to see beneath them the smouldering embers of revolutionary tendencies. They refused help to the one, and displayed a decided hostility to the other. The objection to trade combination was to some extent justified by the violence that had been associated with its propaganda. In 1829, rick-burning, machinery smashing, and the like had taken place under the leadership of the imaginary Captain Swing, and had filled the authorities with alarm. In 1834, after these disorderly tactics had been to a great extent discarded, their revival seemed to be threatening, owing to the formation of a union among the agricultural labourers, and county justices in a state of terror illegally sentenced several leaders of the movement to transportation, and the victims of panic were only saved from this fate by the vigorously demonstrated indignation of the workers. Such instances of class injustice added to the bitterness felt by the masses against the Government which they had helped to place in power.

But the chief causes of the gathering discontent were the severity of the New Poor Law and the exorbitant tax upon newspapers. The old system of the relief of the poor had brought about many social evils. Encouragement was given to thriftlessness, self-indulgence, and imprudence. Demoralisation was eating into the very fibre of the nation ; in the agricultural districts of the South and South Midlands the working classes were rapidly becoming a race of paupers. Wages were reduced by the former administrators of the law and made up out of the rates ; relief was given in the most indiscriminate and unscientific fashion ; whole parishes were on the verge of bankruptcy. The scandal and danger of the system were condemned by political economists and social reformers alike, and the time was ripe for action when in 1833 a Commission was appointed to inquire into the whole matter. The outcome of its inquiries was the Poor Law Act of 1834, an act which was a definite expression of the *laissez-faire*, individualistic spirit which dominated the majority of statesmen of that epoch. The sudden change from the comparative liberality of the old system to the inflexible harshness of the new roused the animosity of the people against the originators of the new Bastilles, the pauper garb and the starvation fare. The North, where the old abuses had not taken root, protested most vehemently against the stern innovation. Owing to a succession of good harvests from 1834-36, the resentment did not immediately

take practical shape. But from 1837 scarcity and the high price of bread brought home to the working classes the rigours of the new law, and roused them thoroughly.

The obstacles to knowledge, caused through the stamp and paper duties, influenced the mind of the more intelligent among the workers in the direction of further political action. William Lovett, Henry Hetherington, and Henry Vincent had taken part in the movement to secure a free press, feeling that until this was obtained but little progress could be made with the education, political and otherwise, of the people. They had defied and evaded the law on many occasions, and Hetherington, in 1834, scored a triumph by defeating the prosecution in the legal proceedings taken against him for publishing the unstamped *Poor Man's Guardian*. In 1836 the duty was reduced to one penny, but greater restrictions were placed upon the issue of unstamped publications. This was looked upon as another piece of truckling to the fears of the propertied classes on the part of the Whigs, and was a further cause of the hatred with which they were regarded by the men of advanced views.

The commercial crisis of 1837 brought the deep-seated discontent to the surface. The misery of the time was so profound that it seemed only too probable that it would culminate in a revolution. The successor to the National Working Class Union, the London Working Men's Association, summoned a public meeting in February of that year, when the Charter,

drawn up by Francis Place, assisted by William Lovett, was adopted. This document is, in the main, a revival of the programme of reform born out of due season in 1780. It consisted of the six points: universal suffrage; abolition of the property qualification for members of parliament; annual parliaments; equal representation; payment of members of parliament, and vote by ballot. Before taking this step towards the building up of a new political party, the avowed aims of the London Association of Working Men had been primarily to create a moral, reflecting, energetic, public opinion, so as eventually to lead to a gradual improvement in the condition of the working classes, without violence or commotion; to unite the honest, sober, moral, and thinking section of their brethren; to form libraries and debating societies; to gain a cheap and honest press; to avoid meeting in public-houses; to instruct women and children with a view to domestic happiness.

The Association carried these ideals into its new political work, and thereby secured for its members the name of "Moral-force Chartists." Propaganda for the Charter was made throughout the country by Vincent and John Cleave. Progress was rapid; at one time there were over 150 Working Men's Associations in existence. The Chartist agitators found help in Feargus O'Connor, who, through his ability and energy as a mob-orator and organiser, had created a number of political unions in the North of England, the members of which were quite ready to



adopt the new democratic programme. His paper, the *Northern Star*, was also a means of spreading the movement, as the journalistic capacity displayed in its columns soon gave it a circulation exceeding that of any other democratic organ. In Birmingham the currency crank, Attwood, hoping to get his currency scheme adopted by the Chartists, had revived and brought into line the Birmingham Political Union, which had taken part in the work of creating popular pressure on behalf of the Reform Bill, and had then become extinct. These additional forces, however, though satisfactory from the point of view of numbers, brought with them those elements of discord which were to render Chartism impotent as far as immediate results were concerned.

The organisation and control of the people during times of great distress and intense excitement require abilities of the highest order, and a stern self-command possessed only by very few. To face crowds of semi-starving men and women whose sufferings cry aloud for redress; to dwell upon the necessity of an organised endeavour being made to bring about a better state of things; to be conscious of the impossibility of a speedy realisation of the hopes of those who are listening, and yet to keep them from being despondent; to do all this, and at the same time to withstand the temptation to indulge in indignant and exciting rhetoric giving covert sanction to useless violence, is a hard matter. It requires the arts and wisdom of the very highest type of the



demagogue. Feargus O'Connor was not capable of such self-mastery. He was a mob-orator, pure and simple, and the applause of the crowd was as the breath of his nostrils. Appeals to physical force, vague though they may be, are always more popular with the masses in times of deep-seated discontent than reasonable argument and persuasion. Hence the moral-force section of Chartism, superior though it was in character, was destined to be swept off its feet by the eloquence of O'Connor, and borne along by a wave of impatient enthusiasm towards disaster and ultimate defeat.

This became evident at the Convention held in London in 1839, which undertook the task of drawing up the petition embodying the points of the Charter which was to be presented to Parliament; it also discussed what was to be the general policy of the movement. The Northern delegates, imbued with the shallow notions of revolution, inculcated by O'Connor and his followers, distrusted the more sober men of the metropolis, and scouted the peaceful ideas put forward by them. Debating, generally taking the form of quarrelling, occupied the time of the Convention, which in May decided to remove to Birmingham. During Whitsuntide vast demonstrations took place at which violent language was freely used, thus giving the authorities an excuse to arrest and imprison Vincent. This action brought popular excitement to white heat. The Convention discussed proposals of retaliation, such as the advocacy of a run

upon the banks (an imitation of a manœuvre of the Reformers during the critical times of 1832), and a universal cessation from work during a "Sacred month." This latter proposition was defeated with great difficulty by the efforts of Lovett and O'Brien, who succeeded in carrying an amendment postponing its acceptance until after the decision of Parliament with regard to the National Petition had been received.

This document, the first of the various Chartist petitions, was presented to the House by Attwood in June 14, 1839. The peculiar views held by this member upon the question of the currency gave less seriousness to the occasion than it deserved. The House, however, decided to discuss the whole question on the 12th of July following.

Between these two dates, however, much was to occur to damage Chartism in the eyes of Parliament. Owing to the unwise and tyrannical action of the police in Birmingham, riots, directly due to the arrest of several Chartist speakers, took place in that town. As a result, the Commons refused to open the question of the petition as arranged. This breach of faith was the signal for more rioting of a very extensive character in the Midland town. Stern measures were then adopted by the Government. In spite of the attempts made by the moral-force men in August to disassociate themselves and the movement from these proceedings, and to show their reliance upon reasonable methods by the rejection of the mad

project of the "Sacred month," the authorities made up their minds that the Chartist leaders were sedition-mongers and dangerous characters. Lovett, Vincent, O'Brien, and O'Connor were punished with imprisonment. These incidents brought about the dissolution of the Convention on September 6, 1839.

This remarkable body, the first democratic gathering of its kind that had taken place in England for several centuries, is of peculiar interest. In spite of dissension and personal animosities, it displayed at times the promise of bringing forth sufficient ability to found a definite organisation of lasting strength and influence, but the strongest men were not the best men ; and the best men were not able to keep their hands upon the reins. The storm that had been raised by passionate propaganda, the excitement that had been created by the incessant agitation of the previous years, was greater and more powerful than they could control. They lacked the power to organise and guide the forces they had brought into play. If a great personality had been at hand who could have dominated the contending factions, adjusted the differences between the moral and physical-force sections, or have given the empty threats of revolutionary action uttered by O'Connor a substantiality which would have been feared, the Convention might have perhaps evolved a workable plan for forcing the six points upon the unwilling Parliament, and have laid the foundations of a democratic political party. But such person-

alities rarely appear in democratic movements at the psychological moment, and such was the case in this instance.

The imprisonment of the leaders led to further outbreaks of disorder, especially in the West, resulting finally in a serious collision between the military and the populace at Newport in an attempt, on the part of an organised mob, to release Vincent from prison by force. This futile demonstration, which brought about the loss of twenty lives, was dealt with in a merciless manner, the organisers being sentenced to transportation for life. Then despair settled down not only upon the working classes but upon their middle class sympathisers. It seemed impossible to find a way out of the morass of misery into which the whole country was rapidly sinking. The prominent Chartists who were still at liberty showed the usual signs of failure. The various factions disputed fiercely about the causes of their non-success. Lovett, during his sojourn in prison, came to the wise opinion that the shortest road to reform was by the spread of education. His method of giving effect to this conclusion was, however, of the most unpractical nature. He put forward a scheme in which it was proposed that the Chartists should collect and devote funds to the building of great schools where the children would receive a thorough literary, technical, and sociological education. He estimated that a subscription of one penny weekly from all those who had signed the Charter would

yield a fund sufficient to establish 80 halls of learning, and 710 circulating libraries. Francis Place, who was the adviser in chief to all reformers of his age, pointed out the insufficiency and impracticability of the scheme. The sum mentioned by Lovett, if it could have been raised, was ridiculously inadequate for the object for which it was to be used. Place urged that education of the scope required should be given by the State, and paid for by a compulsory rate. Lovett was content to commence the work of enlightening the masses with less than £3,000 raised by voluntary contributions; Place would not be satisfied with less than £20,000,000 raised by the Government, and controlled by elected School Boards. Naturally, Lovett's £3,000 could not be obtained. It was not to be supposed that men who were fighting for immediate benefits would be prepared to revise their methods and fall back upon the slow processes of education. Vincent, on the other hand, was convinced, during his period of confinement, that unless the working classes were converted to temperance it was hopeless to think of progress. These new views and proposals accentuated the divisions in the ranks. To the already existing groups of moral and physical-force advocates were now added the teetotal followers of Vincent and the "Knowledge Chartists," as Lovett's partisans were called. Then the Scotch Radicals imported the elements of religious strife by attempting to combine political propaganda with a form

of Labour Church. O'Connor, released from prison, maintained his former policy of violent denunciation, ridiculing all methods of advancing the cause which did not agree with his plans. But he brought with him from captivity a new source of distraction—his notorious land scheme—which was to prove the most disastrous failure of all.

The situation was further complicated by the entrance of a new factor upon the political field—the Complete Suffrage Movement—which, promoted by Joseph Sturge, a foremost member of the anti-Corn Law League, was intended to secure by middle class support the main points of the Charter by constitutional means, and at the same time to win over the working classes to the side of the Free Trade Movement. A conference was held between the Complete Suffragists and the Chartists at Birmingham in December, 1842, in order to find a common ground of action. But it was soon discovered that there was no possibility of arriving at an agreement. On one side, the name of "Chartist" was clung to with unshakable resolution; on the other, distrust of O'Connor was too deep to be overcome. The Chartists, left alone at the Conference, squabbled and divided until the number of delegates dwindled down from more than 300 to 37, who were disciples of O'Connor. He was now practically the unchallenged leader of the movement, and devoted himself almost entirely to pushing his land scheme, to the exclusion of all else.

Things dragged on during the next few years, fed by the general discontent pervading the country, caused by heavy commercial depression and a series of financial crises. At the parliamentary elections of 1847, several supporters of the Charter obtained seats, amongst whom was O'Connor, who, to the surprise not only of his enemies but also of his friends, defeated a Whig minister at Nottingham. This victory put more life into the agitators for a while, and when the revolutionary spirit, then rapidly developing on the Continent, spread to England, it found sufficient embers glowing to blow into a hot flame. The idea of drawing up a petition to Parliament was revived, and steps were taken to make the document the greatest of its kind. The physical-force men were encouraged by the revolutionary successes abroad to advocate similar methods at home, and to talk of an armed rising of the people if their demands were not acceded to immediately. But while in Europe thrones were tottering and ministers were flying through the outburst of popular revolt, in England the governing classes had prepared to meet any sign of armed coercion with effective opposition, and London was not to witness the fleeting democratic triumphs which were gained at Paris, Vienna, and Berlin. Physical force was discussed and threatened, but O'Connor, who had been formerly the chief exponent of that idea, was not prepared to follow up his early declamatory violence by actual deeds. So, when it was proposed that the great petition of 1848



should be accompanied to the House of Commons by an escort of the people in overwhelming numbers, he advised peaceful procedure and submission to the orders of the police, who refused to allow Westminster Bridge to be crossed by the crowds which had gathered at Kennington Common. The petition was, therefore, carried quietly into the Chamber and referred to Committee. Here it was discovered that the statements as to the number of signatures had been grossly exaggerated. Instead of over five millions of names, it was found to contain no more than two millions, and many of these were either forgeries or absurd jests.

This fiasco ended the last great rally of the working classes round an organisation of a definitely political character. The collapse of O'Connor's land scheme, amid charges of dishonesty and corruption against its originator, hastened their disillusionment. New leaders, like Ernest Jones, threw their energy for a time into a new agitation, but without result. The success, in 1846, of Cobden and Bright's struggle for the abolition of the Corn Laws began to bear fruit by relieving the distress amongst the masses. The rising co-operative movement drew the attention of many of the most intelligent artisans who had formed the real backbone—the moral-force men. Trade Unionism offered a sphere for practical activity to those who were growing tired of so many failures in political action. Others emigrated, despairing of being able to achieve anything by further exertions. In the



year 1855, the movement that had promised to do so much to improve the condition of the people disappeared, having done nothing towards realising its aims, except to call attention to them, and having checked, by its failure, all interest in politics on the part of the people for a long period.

The collapse of Chartism can be traced to several causes. It was, in the first place, the outcome of bad social and economic conditions. Its basis was hunger and want, two things which can bring about revolutions when other circumstances are favourable; but in England the other circumstances were not favourable. The fight was against a government of the middle class firmly installed in power, and not a feeble aristocratic regime that simply required a push to throw it off its balance. The skilled leaders who had engineered the Reform Bill were satisfied for the time being with the work they had done, and were not prepared to lead a new agitation. The men who tried to do so were, in most cases, totally unfitted for their task. Enthusiastic, self-sacrificing, courageous as many of them were, they were not equipped with either the knowledge or experience required in order to successfully undertake that most difficult undertaking—the forming and holding together of a democratic party. The early moral-force men, like Lovett and Vincent, were idealists, followers of Owen, who believed in the innate capacity of the people to appreciate and follow appeals to them to act together for the good of all, and to work persistently for a

political ideal. A consciousness that he was wrong in so thinking dawned upon Lovett, when, while in prison, he wrote down his conviction that nothing could be done until the people had been educated. Probably he felt that he and other leaders required education also. Francis Place records that Lovett and Vincent once visited him to talk over a speech the latter had made, which was considered to have been a great effort. Place showed them that all of the historical statements made in this address, twelve in number, were erroneous and directly contrary to fact. Both Lovett and Vincent requested him to draw up a course of reading, which they promised to follow. "But," adds Place, "Vincent could neither read nor work."<sup>1</sup> It is no matter for wonder that when the economic situation gradually improved, the movement fell away. The leaders gave it no intellectual foundation, and the moral impulse, imparted by the moral-force men, was obscured by the appeals to class hatred, jealousy, and suspicion which emanated from demagogues like O'Connor and his school. We find that the ascendancy of these men produced the narrow, intolerant spirit which is still rampant in our day in democratic circles, and expresses itself in the denunciation of any reform put forward by other people, even though it may lead in the desired direction. Thus the Chartists fought the anti-Corn League as bitterly as the ground landlords, and their leaders opposed co-operation,

<sup>1</sup> "Life of Francis Place," Graham Wallas, p. 381, footnote.

because it did not come within their programme. Too late were efforts made to placate the co-operators and win them over to political action. The harm had been done, and the distrust of democracy in politics had grown chronic, and apparently insuperable, not only among the middle classes, but also among the workers.

Finally, the dissensions between the leaders killed all chances of the movement growing. If unity had been possible between them, the movement might have overcome those early difficulties which are inseparable from all new movements. But ambition, ignorance, conceit and envy; the inability to take a broad, statesmanlike view of affairs; the desire of each man to push his personal fad, entirely regardless of its effect upon the general support, prevented anything approaching to harmonious action. At one time a currency scheme was to save the people, at another a general strike, and finally an unsound land scheme. For a movement to succeed, a consistent programme must be thought out, and revised from time to time as experience demands. It must take a survey of all the problems, economic, social and political, and be prepared to deal with each. No panacea can be produced that will cure all the ills of society. The Chartist movement was a succession of endeavours to find a panacea, and its experience is a lasting warning of the folly of such a policy.

## CHAPTER III

## MODERN WORKING-CLASS POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

THE failure of the Chartist movement was proof of the impossibility of building up a political party simply on the temporary discontent of the masses caused by physical want and suffering. Such elements will help to swell the ranks of supporters for a time, but unless there is a solid kernel of men who have intellectual convictions, no aggressive political movement among the workers will outlast a revival of trade and the accompanying relief from immediate economic anxiety. The vast majority of those who demanded the six points were more concerned with the urgent question of how and where they could obtain either work, better wages, or even the necessities of life. As Carlyle said, Chartism was a knife-and-fork question to most of those who enrolled themselves under its banner. Hence, with the return of comparative prosperity the movement shrank away, and the workers turned their attention once more to trade unionism and co-operation, and left politics alone, believing that it was an unprofitable field.

The depth of the political apathy that marks the

years from 1850 to 1866 is shown by the fact that although various proposals to widen the franchise came before the House of Commons during that period, no wide popular support was to be found for them. The individuals comprising the small body of Radicals in the House were as voices crying in the wilderness. The people's energies and attention were engaged elsewhere. They were not to be stirred again until 1867, when, amid a commercial crisis of serious magnitude and a slight recrudescence of disorder, the franchise was widened for the second time by the measure which constituted a striking instance of the opportunism which has since been the dominating feature in English party politics. The spirit of this period was one of reaction against the socialistic ideas of the Chartists. The skilled artisan had laid the foundation of the great organisations which have created the modern aristocracy of labour, and had to a great extent adopted the *laissez-faire* notions with regard to economics then popular among the ruling classes. There were no popular ideas current as to the necessity of altering the basis of society in order to secure permanent benefit. The existing system under which workman and capitalist were to fight out their disagreement while the State kept the ring, was accepted as the proper order. The individualism of the trade unionists, and their reliance on voluntary effort and distrust of State interference, except under the most urgent circumstances, expressed itself in an abstention from all political action, except

through the exertion of influence on the two orthodox political parties for securing further facilities and legal recognition of trade combinations. The foundation, in 1864, of the International Association of Working Men—a body which appeared as a spectre of red revolution to the governing classes of the Continent—having for its object the economic and political emancipation of the working classes throughout the civilised world, had little effect upon the situation in this country. The insular prejudices of the English race, which are probably as strong among the working class as any other section of society, were but slightly influenced by appeals to International Brotherhood, or the ideal of the Continental democrats; and although some of the more thoughtful of the working-class leaders became attached to the organisation, it cannot be said to have played an important part in developing the idea of direct political action among the masses.

With the re-awakening of 1867, it became obvious to the leaders of organised workers that in the wider franchise they had a weapon at command which could be used in the interest of labour. Not only was pressure brought to bear upon the candidates of both parties for the purpose of obtaining promises of support for measures of a reforming character, but steps were taken to elect independent men to the House of Commons. A Labour Representation League, with a unionist backing, came into existence; George Odger, a popular and eloquent trade unionist and working-class leader, made five unsuccessful attempts

between the years 1868 and 1874, to enter Parliament for metropolitan and county constituencies against both Whig and Tory. In the latter year the trade unions took the matter up in earnest, the miners, ironworkers, and other societies voting money toward the expenses of parliamentary contests. John Stuart Mill, Professor Beesly, and Mr. Frederic Harrison all favoured this step; Mill especially taking the line that the Whigs would have to be fought hard by the workers before they would pay attention to the just demands of the latter. The main reason of this re-awakening of interest in politics was chiefly due to the refusal of the Whigs to deal with the remaining legal disabilities of trade unions. It was not caused by the conviction that a permanent third party was necessary; it was merely an effort to secure working-class representation to watch over the interests of organised trades. Thirteen candidates were nominated and went to the poll, most of them fighting three-cornered contests. Of the thirteen, only two were successful, Messrs. Alexander and Burt, who were, therefore, the first Labour members, in the modern sense, of the House of Commons. It will be remembered that the latter has held office in a Liberal ministry, thus making it clear that the revival of 1874 was not an effort to form a new party, but one to secure from the Liberals the recognition of working-class claims to representation. The entrance of this new element into the field, and the general dissatisfaction with Liberalism on the



part of the unionists, helped to bring about the return of the Conservatives, who, during their term of office, partially removed the legal grievances of which the workers had complained.

It is almost a general law in the history of the last century—excepting between 1870-74—that in times of good trade interest in political reform slackened and almost disappeared, only to return with the arrival of depression. This is more than ever apparent during the last twenty-five years. From 1874 to 1879 commercial prosperity, which had been of an exceptional character, began to decline. Trade, till 1874, had been good, and wages high. Trade unionism had reached the zenith of its power and influence, to which it had been helped by the invaluable work of middle-class men like Mr. Frederic Harrison, Professor Beesly, and others. The individualistic idea attained its greatest development. As far as politics was concerned, all efforts after social reform of a far-reaching character were forgotten in the reign of comparative plenty. But in 1875 trade began to fall off; strikes and lock-outs occurred with startling frequency, in most cases resulting in the defeat of the workers. The downward tendency reached its lowest point in 1879, in which year many trade combinations were swept out of existence, and even the strongest suffered severely under the strain imposed upon them through the cost of the maintenance of their unemployed members. The situation, judging from former experience, was



ripe for a new movement in the direction of reform through political action.

The swing of the electoral pendulum which carried the Liberals into office with a large majority in 1880 was the first sign of this movement. Then, when the slight improvement in trade which in 1881-83 followed the acute crisis of 1879 had expended itself, a new factor began to take a place in the political field. The Social Democratic Federation, formed in the early eighties, carried on an active propaganda of the ideas of so-called scientific socialism, and inculcated at the same time the necessity for the formation of a definite working-class political party. The agitation found ample material to work upon, especially when, in 1885, it combined a crusade on behalf of the unemployed with the preaching of Marxian doctrines. The condition of the labour market showed conclusively the necessity of some radical reforms being adopted, even if it did not justify the belief that no hope existed for the working classes except in a social revolution. The insufficiency, and even the futility, of trade unionism and co-operation as means for improving the condition of the working classes was insisted upon, with persistent iteration, by socialist speakers and writers. The disorder that took place in London in 1885 and the following year gave wide advertisement to the socialist movement, and excited the interest not only of the working classes but also of the middle and upper classes. But so far as the masses were concerned, it

soon became evident that the roots of the movement had not struck deeply. Gradually, as commerce and industry revived, the interest in socialism dropped off. The doctrine of the class war failed to arouse and bind the people of England as it had done in Germany, where, no matter whether the industrial conditions were good or bad, the Social Democratic party, with its theoretically revolutionary basis and its practical programme of palliatives, has grown, in spite of prosecution or of toleration, from year to year almost without a check for more than a quarter of a century.<sup>1</sup> In England, however, the agitation only resulted in a repetition of the experience of the Chartist movement. The best known of the working-class socialist leaders, disappointed in the slow progress of purely socialist propaganda, instead of concentrating their efforts upon the task of organising

<sup>1</sup> The growth of the German Social Democratic party since 1871 can be best understood from the following table :—

Imperial Election in	Total Number of Social Democratic Votes.	Members elected to Reichstag.
1871	124,655	2
1874	351,952	9
1877	493,288	12
1878	437,158	9
1881	311,961	12
1884	549,990	24
1887	763,128	11
1890	1,427,298	35
1893	1,876,738	43 { 4 more seats won before 1898 at by-elections.
1893	2,107,100	56 { 2 more seats won since at by- elections up to April, 1902.

It is anticipated by politicians belonging to all parties in Germany that there will be another large increase in the number of Social Democratic votes at the election in 1903.

the masses for political purposes, turned their attention to the permeation of existing trade unions with socialistic theories, and the creation of combinations amongst the unskilled workers. These endeavours, which received an enormous impetus through the Dock Strike of 1889, brought the New Unionism, which has practically eradicated the individualistic ideas that had dominated the minds of the majority of trade unionists, into existence. The effect of this work was seen in the increased activity and interest displayed by the organised working classes in social politics as evidenced in the Trade Union Congresses. For some years after 1889 "The Labour Movement" formed a standing heading of a column of news in several London daily papers. The movement, it is true, was fluid so far as general politics was concerned. There was, however, a possibility that it would solidify into a definite political socialist party. On the other hand, it was probable, in the light of past history, that it would work itself out in revivifying and strengthening trade unionism. The first possibility was rendered doubtful by the advocacy by middle-class socialists of the Fabian School of the saturation of the Liberal party with collectivist ideas. This policy, indeed, promised some measure of success, as the Government of 1892-95 seemed at first to be open to conviction as to the need of taking a new departure. An era of progress seemed to have set in which would cut the ground from under the feet of those who argued in favour of the establishment of a third

party. This hope of the capture of Liberalism was disappointed. The Liberals were not strong enough nor united enough to bear the weight of the Home Rule Bill together with a programme showing the marks of socialistic tendencies. Prosperity was again lulling the nation to sleep when the general election of 1895, suddenly sprung upon the country, not only formed the beginning, for Liberalism, of a long sojourn in the wilderness, but also played havoc with the few Labour members who had secured seats in 1892. It also brought defeat for the candidates of that section of Labour men and Socialists which, under the name of the Independent Labour party, had made an attempt to unite the workers on political lines.

This crushing blow to the hopes of this new organisation seemed for a time to arrest all further action. The years immediately following 1895 were dull and marked by reaction. The interest formerly centred on domestic reform was transferred to foreign affairs, and the new Imperialistic spirit began to bear fruit. But the widespread propaganda made in the interests of social democracy during the previous fifteen years had not been without lasting effect. The revolutionary Marxism of the eighties had given way to a more sober and practical basis. The trade unions at last began to act upon the resolutions passed at their annual congresses year after year in favour of direct Labour representation, and raised funds for the purpose of defraying the election expenses of Labour candidates. Before the election of

1900 the Labour Representation Committee, composed of delegates from trade societies, the Independent Labour party, and other bodies, was formed to promote the return of working-class candidates to Parliament. This Committee, however, was not in existence long enough to make itself felt to any great extent at the election, but it can claim to have done something towards securing the return of at least one representative.<sup>1</sup> It has increased in strength since its inception, the organisations affiliated to it returning their membership as 600,000.<sup>2</sup>

The fight for the working-class party in 1900 was conducted chiefly by the Independent Labour party and the Social Democratic Federation, under whose auspices eleven seats were contested. It is true that only one of the seats was secured, but, owing to the general condition of politics at the time, and the suddenness with which the election came upon the country, this result was not a matter of surprise. That the overwhelming defeat of 1895 had not caused the total disappearance of the Independent Labour party and kindred bodies is a significant proof that the workers are at last appreciating the fact that a new party is a possibility, and that they are willing to support men of ability and character who are not attached

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Richard Bell, member for Derby. Secretary, Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants.

<sup>2</sup> These figures were given at the Annual Conference of the Committee held in March, 1902.

to either of the two great historical sections. This is further made clear when we examine the figures given for independent candidates in October, 1900. Fewer Labour and Socialist candidates were then run as compared with 1895, but the average number of votes secured is more than double that obtained in 1895.<sup>1</sup>

It is therefore obvious that the combined Socialist and Labour movement has brought about one result. It has, in conjunction with other factors, broken down the tradition that the Liberal party is, and must remain, the sole progressive force in politics, and that the only way to reform is for the workers to attach themselves to it, and refrain from independent efforts on their own account. This two-party dogma is vanishing rapidly. In the face of Liberal obstinacy, the policy of "splitting" has now been followed with such frequency and with such good reason, that it is no longer considered to be a foolish blunder. Not only has this idea of independence come about with regard to national politics, but also, and to an even greater extent, in connection with municipal government. Throughout the country, on School Boards, County, Town and District Councils, and other local authorities, hundreds of seats are occupied by the representatives of a third party, who are consciously using the machinery of civic administration for the purpose of building up the power and influence of democracy in new spheres.

<sup>1</sup> See Annual Report of Independent Labour party, 1901.

To the experience of such men is due in great measure the moderate views which have replaced the exaggerated expectations current among the socialist agitators in the early days of the movement.

In concluding this hurried survey of the various movements that have arisen during the last seventy years, having for their object the political organisation of the people, it is of importance that attention should be given to the development and variation of the ideas that formed their theoretical basis. In the Chartist agitation the aim was to secure certain political rights for the purpose of realising a social ideal, which was ever shifting and never clear. The vague socialism of Owen was no doubt the goal which the best of the leaders hoped to reach, but the methods to be adopted were never definite or actually agreed upon. Hence uncertainty, distraction, dissension, and finally failure resulted. There was no real perception of the vast problems that were to be solved; no thorough understanding of the enormous amount of slow educational and organising work that would have to be done in order to create an intelligent, orderly, yet alert democracy. There was ever present that self-deceiving idealisation of the masses, which turns to cynical disdain and despair when disillusion has opened the eyes of the reformer sufficiently to enable him to see things as they really are. In the Trade Union parliamentary effort of 1874, nothing further was looked for than the abolition of all obstacles to combination. The



agitation of the early eighties was founded partly upon a resurrection of the revolutionary notions of 1848, tempered by a wider knowledge of economics and historical evolution. But the phraseology with which the leaders advanced their cause, and the dogmatic avowal of the apparent belief in a sudden social change of a revolutionary character, together with the insistence upon an incomplete economic theory, obscured the real objects of the movement, and repelled the English working-class mind. The latest phase, as seen in the continued vitality of the Independent Labour party, with its less dogmatic socialistic theory and its practical programme on immediate issues, taken into consideration with the fact that the increased sympathy of the trade unions towards political methods is rapidly assuming concrete form owing to the growing fear that their effectiveness in other directions has been greatly curtailed, seems to point to the permanent existence of a third party.

The time is eminently favourable to its development. The Liberal Party is, as we have already stated, in a bankrupt condition. Its want of leaders, principles, and definite programme preclude the possibility of it being able to rally the people once more to its side. The desire for a new departure is not confined either to the unenfranchised or to those who are actuated by personal discontent. It is to be found in the ranks of Liberalism itself, where the division and insincerity of the leaders has aroused deep dissatisfaction



and disgust. The growing demand on the part of the aristocracy of labour for a separate voice in the Legislature, as displayed, for instance, in a practical fashion by the mining operatives by the institution of a fund for election purposes, which will amount to over £16,000—a sum that can be raised yearly if necessary—is also another factor in the sum-total of the tendencies that are breaking the power of orthodox Liberalism. If these various elements—dissatisfied Radicals, socialists, and trade unionists—can be welded together, they are certain to evolve into the nucleus of a new democratic party.

The question, however, still arises as to how this psychological moment can be properly utilised. Will the trade unionist parliamentarians be content to fight simply for the interests of their immediate constituents, or will they be prepared to work with the more advanced socialistic representatives? Will the extreme left of the Radicals have the courage to join hands with both, and act independently of the official Liberals? Labour representation, in the narrow sense in which it is sometimes used, is not the same thing as representation of the people. We have found in the past that the miners' representatives have done most excellent work for the colliers. They have forced from the House of Commons regulations for the better management of mines which have done away with much of the danger attached to work in those places. They are now demanding, and have been on one occasion

within measurable distance of obtaining, State regulation of the hours of labour for their trade. But it is not unfair to say that on general political questions they have made no specially valuable contributions. They have, as a rule, been content to follow the lead of the Liberals. An increase in the number of such delegates, excellent though they may be personally, and however well they may work for those engaged in the occupation with which they are connected, would not hasten the creation of a real democratic party. What is required is not special representations of miners, engineers, postmen, or unskilled workers, but representation of the people through a party working together on an agreed programme. Without such an organised body St. Stephen's may be converted into another Trade Union Congress where differences between various sections of workers will be fought out, and the general interests of the people will be neglected. Some guiding principles must be adopted, or no tangible result of any benefit to progress as a whole will follow. Up till now there are no signs of any general agreement upon a line of policy among labour men already in the House of Commons. Even on the Eight Hours' Bill for miners there is division of opinion. Any further addition to the Labour bench at St. Stephen's without an understanding being arrived at as to the attitude to be taken up on vital questions will only increase the confusion already existing. The Labour Representation Committee

may bring about some bond of union; but in any case it will be necessary to make it clear and definite.

It would be unwise to be very hopeful of the possibility of the Radical left wing taking the lead and breaking away from its party. The able men belonging to this group are apparently not bold and self-sacrificing enough to enter upon a course of action which, so far as can be seen, would probably for ever cut them off from the chance of office. They might possibly follow a strong man who was willing to make the plunge, but there are at present no signs of such a man coming forward.

The quarter, therefore, from which a new party is most likely to evolve lies in the existing independent political bodies, and among the workers organised for trade purposes. Efforts should be made to unite these two elements and supplement them with new forces. As a first step to this end, a representative conference should be called, composed of delegates from all organisations in favour of immediate action being taken to form a new political group on national lines. To this gathering should also be invited politicians and men of eminence who have expressed themselves in accord with the proposition. The conference must not be a one-day affair, but should be prepared to assemble every day for a week or longer if necessary, in order to discuss the situation and to beat out a minimum programme and methods of organisation. Having settled upon the

programme, an Executive Committee should be appointed to carry out the details of the work of organisation, and to collect funds for this purpose. A number of speakers of the highest order obtainable should be selected to enter upon a campaign of political education and agitation throughout the country, fixing at first upon those centres where active work has already been done. There would be little difficulty in arranging this campaign, for in nearly every town of any size in England there now exists a group of men who have already been engaged in local political work, and who could get together a committee to arrange meetings. There is even now, while no great effort is being made to undertake a widespread movement of a democratic nature, a demand from working-class political societies for speakers of a fairly good calibre, which cannot be supplied. Agitation must be followed up by organising work undertaken by men of experience and ability. For many persons the last fifteen years has been a period of education in this direction, so there should be no difficulty in finding a sufficient number to carry out the task with some show of success. As far as possible the method of the other political parties must be followed, in so far as that the agitator and organiser must devote his whole time to the cause he is serving. Such important duties must not be left to the chance enthusiasm of voluntary effort.

This, of course, implies that it will be necessary to raise money for the purpose of paying the salaries of

agitators and organisers. There is a curious prejudice among democrats against payment being given for energy expended in political work. But experience teaches that unless a political party has in its service a number of men who devote the whole of their time to its business as salaried officials, that party will never succeed. The Liberals and Conservatives have at their command machinery guided by trained men learned in all the arts of electioneering and the intricacies of the franchise, who would not be able to exercise their skill in this direction if they at the same time had to earn their livelihood by other means. The big vested interests, such as the brewing industry, give thousands in order to provide the organising capacity for the side with which they are in sympathy. The mass of the people have been spoilt by the rich, who have courted them for their votes, and in return for the support given to them have defrayed the expenses of political organisation. By long familiarity with this generosity on the part of other people, the workman, who is perfectly willing to contribute towards the cost of maintaining his trade union and its officials, has, up till now, objected to pay towards the expense of securing his political ends. The valedictory letter of Mr. Hyndman to the Executive of the Social Democratic Federation pointed to this when he stated that the people of England seemed to lack the capacity for political organisation.<sup>1</sup> A district, he states, would be

<sup>1</sup> See Report of Annual Conference of the Social Democratic Federation, 1901.

worked and organised by the Federation for a time, and then, when an election had been fought and lost, the old apathetic, listless condition would settle down once more upon it. The only way to prevent the continuance of this state of things is to bring home to the masses that they must be prepared to support their cause not only with their votes but with their money.

There seems, however, to be some ground for the belief that this objection to the financial support of a political movement is being gradually overcome. The decision of the miners to raise £16,000 for political purposes by means of a shilling levy, which has already been referred to—and, it may be mentioned, was agreed upon by 250,000 votes against 50,000—is an instance of this. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers, formerly one of the most conservative of working-class organisations so far as political action is concerned, has now a similar fund, though of smaller dimensions. The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants has its secretary in the House of Commons as Labour member for Derby, and is considering the advisability of contesting other constituencies. Other unions are following these examples by providing money for the payment of the expenses of the election of their members to local public bodies, and for the member's loss of time while engaged in public work. If all these scattered endeavours were systematised and to a certain extent centralised, there would be no lack of funds for the purposes set out here.

The work of educational agitation and re-

organisation is of such an important character that it should be clearly recognised that the best and most able men must devote themselves to it. The tendency in democratic movements has been for the foremost personalities to hasten to obtain a seat either in the legislative chamber or on some important administrative authority. This should be avoided in the future. The genius for awakening lasting enthusiasm for ideals of any kind is so rare that when it is found it should not be buried in a County Council Committee room, or allow itself to be wasted in the arid atmosphere of St. Stephen's. If those who possess this gift harness themselves dutifully to the tasks they were elected to carry out, they cannot, at the same time, keep alive and develop the necessary vitality in the movement. If they neglect their legislative or administrative duties in order to undertake the rôle of agitator, they will be called to account by their constituents, and counted by them as failures, while the ideas they represent will be held to be equally faulty. The place in the democratic movement of the orator and the talented man of affairs lies for some years outside public bodies. They should lay the foundations of the new party in the minds of the people before commencing to try to build up concrete expressions of its principles through new laws. Without a well-educated and enthusiastic party behind it, a new parliamentary group will only be born in order to die as soon as its novelty no longer attracts the changeable mind of the elector, or the



ignorant, extravagant hopes of its supporters are disappointed by the experience that sure progress only advances slowly, no matter who advocates or works for it.

Further, questions naturally arise as to whether it is possible that a Conference such as is here suggested could be brought together, and as to which body should take the initial steps. At the present moment it may not be possible to organise such a gathering, although proposals to this end are in the air. But when affairs in South Africa have exhausted public interest, and attention is once more directed to domestic affairs, we shall doubtless see an attempt made to arrive at a general agreement among the various democratic sections. It could emanate either from the trade unions through the medium of the Labour Representation Committee, which forms the link between unionism and the political side of the Labour movement; or from the Labour and Socialist members in the House of Commons; or from middle-class democrats who wish to attach themselves to a body of men who are in earnest. But from whatever source the first move may come, and whatever the programme may be that is agreed upon, one thing is certain—that the immediate work before any new democratic party is the education of the people in the knowledge of what democracy should really be.



## CHAPTER IV

## THE BASIS FOR A DEMOCRATIC PROGRAMME

THE settlement of a programme is the main difficulty which has always arisen in connection with endeavours to form a new democratic party. The many political questions that have yet to be dealt with in order to secure the widening of democratic government have been so many stumbling-blocks and causes of division to the unity of action which is required in order to form a homogeneous movement and organisation. There are a multitude of bodies in existence, each urging upon the people some special piece of reform which, if secured, would undoubtedly lead to beneficial results. Purely mechanical political changes are urged in one direction; a special form of taxation in another; the abolition of certain laws in yet another; and the assumption on the part of the State of various functions, such as the regulation of the hours of adult male labour, in still another. All these are excellent and probably necessary items in a plan of general democratic reform, but they require co-ordination in such a plan, and at the same time the amalgamation of the forces

behind each into one compact whole. There is a tremendous waste of reforming zeal and energy going on owing to this want of general agreement. Not only so, but often a direct clashing of procedure takes place which is detrimental to rapid progress. As an instance of this may be quoted the action of two organisations in London, both of a working-class character, in connection with the metropolitan Housing problem. One body, itself favourable to the municipal housing of the people, abuses the London County Council for buying land for that purpose before it has secured, through the pressure upon Parliament, the taxation of ground values and the unearned increment. The other society is constantly protesting that the London County Council is not pushing forward rapidly enough with the purchase of land for housing purposes, and urging speedier action regardless of other considerations. Such examples of divided counsels can be met with at every turn, and are the despair of the democrat, who sees the importance of united, concerted measures.

There is, however, one favourable sign which seems to make the formulation of a democratic programme that would attract general support more likely in the future than it was in the past. The working classes, so far as the most intelligent section is concerned, can no longer be described as seriously divided as between collectivist and individualist ideas. Judging from the debates of the Trade Union Congress, it can be fairly said that the general tendency lies in the former

direction, although the stormy inrush of the New Unionist movement, which carried many delegates much further than they had a right to go in pledging their constituents, has to a great extent subsided. The steady support which has been given to the progressive policy of the majority of the London County Council, and the general rise in the interest displayed in the activities of municipalities, is also evidence in favour of the correctness of this view. Further, we have the miners in favour of the nationalisation of the mines, and the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants asking for the same process to be applied to the railways. Hence there would be no likelihood of serious differences arising as to the attitude a new democratic party should take up towards State action.

That this attitude ought to be a collectivist one is hardly a debatable matter at our present stage of economic development. An individualistic democracy is unthinkable. The industrial evolution has carried us so far that no other way lies before the people to secure a just measure of "leisure, pleasure, and treasure," except by the regulation of industrial conditions through the State, either directly or indirectly. The course of modern economic history, although it has not exactly followed the lines laid down for it in the Communist manifesto, or other prophecies of orthodox Marxists, has yet travelled along a road which lies in the direction pointed out by them. The latter half of the last century, in

its record of legislation, shows a constant checking, on behalf of the people, of the blind power of capital, whose strength, growing ever greater as the consciousness of the value of combination and the wastefulness of competition was awakened, threatened at one time to bring about even graver social ills than those under which a vast number of the workers still suffer. There can be seen the beginnings of an ever-widening sphere of State interference, protecting first women and children from the physical dangers of over-long hours and unhealthy conditions of labour ; indirectly determining, in some trades, the working time of adult male labour ; granting to municipalities the power to own and control monopolies of various kinds in the interest of the whole community ; then laying down stipulations as to the rate of wages that artisans and labourers working directly and indirectly for the community should receive. These measures of regulation, and others that there is no space to indicate here, are the logical development of a community which is democratic in its basic ideas. To attempt to reverse the process, and go back to a *laissez-faire* system of government, founded on individualistic notions of liberty, would be as absurd and fruitless as to request the great rings, trusts, and amalgamations of capital which are being formed every day to break themselves up once again into their original integral parts, and to fight for markets on the old plan of the devil taking the hindmost. The business of the new party would be to see that the

workers receive a due share of the benefits arising from the new method and order that is rapidly taking the place of the former reckless competitive scramble in the industrial world. This can only be done by the exercise of political power. It would be a mistaken confidence, which the workers should no longer be prepared to display, to trust any longer simply to the crude weapons that Trade Unionism offers.

There are various pieces of political reform which must be secured before the masses can exert their full influence upon the course of legislation. The abolition of the hereditary principle in the legislature; the attainment of adult suffrage; the shortening of the qualifying period and other improvements in the registration laws; second ballot; the payment of members and of election expenses, will all, as a matter of course, form part of a democratic programme.

But to insist, as some democrats are inclined to do, that it is absolutely necessary that these points must be carried before the working classes can build up a parliamentary party is a mistake. The fact is, that the masses have not even yet been made fully aware of the power that lies already in their hands. The organised workers are not the poverty-stricken wage slaves that they are sometimes depicted by the enthusiastic socialist agitator, and it is from the organised workers that the kernel of a democratic party must be formed. The costliness of elections and the expense of maintaining members of parliament do

not stand in the way of working-class representation when those chiefly concerned are earnest in the desire to obtain a place at St. Stephen's. The case of the miners has already been referred to as an example of the capacity of the masses, when they have the will, to overcome the financial difficulties of parliamentary action by an effort which would hardly be felt by the individuals taking part in it. It has many times been calculated how much the workers could raise by levy of a shilling per year for the purposes of political work. If one and a half out of the estimated two millions of trade unionists in the country were to arrive at the same conclusion as the miners, more than a hundred candidates could enter the field fully equipped with the money necessary to carry on a well-organised contest. Therefore, to give prominence to the alteration in the mechanism of representation as if nothing vital could be achieved until it has been secured is a policy that should be avoided. On the whole, it may be considered that in order to make sure of the stability of a democratic movement, it would be best for the workers themselves to pay directly towards the cost of abolishing the surviving undemocratic features of our electoral system, even as the middle classes have done in the past in order to reach their present position of power. Rights that are secured without self-sacrifice are seldom prized by those who receive benefit from them.

It can be safely assumed that a general agreement could be arrived at upon the purely political side of a

programme, as the points already referred to have been the commonplaces of advanced politicians for many years. The other and more important side of the document, the use to which political power is to be put, may give rise to difficulties even among collectivists. Thus a dispute, in connection with the Labour Representation Committee, arose between the Independent Labour Party and the Social Democratic Federation, because the first-named body refused to support a proposition that the basis of the Committee's policy should be the recognition of the "class war." The result was that the Social Democratic Federation withdrew from the Committee, and one more effort to found a united democratic party has been a partial failure. It is not possible, nor would it be wise if it were, to insist upon the adoption of the dogmas of a rigid socialist theory which contains within it the survival of revolutionary ideas that no longer contain any definite meaning. It will be sufficient if a declaration is made that no theoretical limits should be put upon the power of the State in all its phases to control and regulate industrial and social conditions in the interest of the whole of the community. Then on that basis could be framed a practical social programme which would deal with actual conditions requiring State intervention. To make a conventional declaration that the party aims at the socialisation of all capital on the ground that no lasting social improvement can be obtained until that ideal is realised would not strengthen the pro-



gramme, for it contains a fallacy. Every step that has been taken to bring industry under some form of collective control has meant a permanent uplifting of those sections of the working classes it has affected. From this experience the extension of the principle can be advocated in the solution of all social questions. It may, however, be proved from further knowledge that some forms of industry, when properly checked by factory and sanitary acts, may flourish best, from all points of view, under individual control or some form of voluntary co-operation. It is quite clear that it would be impossible, within a measurable period of time, if ever, for the State to take over and manage the whole complex industrial system as demanded by the extreme social democrat. But there are a number of monopolies which are now ready to have the principle of State ownership applied to them. The practical social programme should include the nationalisation of railways, canals, and mines; the municipalisation of all local enterprises which serve universal needs, such as gas, water, electric lighting and power supplies; tramways and other general means of traffic; the granting of powers to municipalities to deal effectively with the housing question, the drink traffic, and other local problems, not only in the interest of the workers, in the conventional sense, but of all useful classes. In order that a due share of the benefit of these measures should be secured to the masses, a normal eight hours' working day should be gradu-

ally introduced into all forms of public employment, and then applied to industry under private management; the trade union rate of wages should also be adopted as a standard by all public bodies, both for their direct employé's and those of their contractors. As a step towards the total extinction of privately owned ground rent and unearned increment, a system of taxation should be advocated which would gradually transfer them to the community.

To another point of the greatest importance to the welfare of the people—the education question—special attention should be given. A strong effort should be made to bring about, as rapidly as possible, the abolition of child-labour and the half-time system. There must be a well-thought-out scheme of national education, developed on democratic lines, including better facilities for the acquirement by the people of secondary and higher grade instruction; the establishment of State training colleges for teachers; an increased number of universities and advanced technical schools. For practical purposes, this portion of the programme should be kept free from the superfluities that have usually been associated with advanced views on educational matters, such as the free maintenance of all scholars, from those attending primary schools to the university graduate; or the making of all stages in education free and open to every one alike. It is not necessary or advisable that every member of the community should receive a

university training. It is quite probable that many men who, under present conditions, go to Oxford or Cambridge, would be using their time to more practical advantage if they were engaged in work of another kind better suited to their capacities and temperaments. Hence it should be understood that although the opportunity of securing the highest educational advantages should be thrown open as widely as possible, yet the fitness for the task of those who are desirous of continuing their studies until they have reached the age of adults would always be taken into consideration.

The reform of the Poor Law should also be dealt with. The provision of State-paid Old Age Pensions must form part of any scheme in this direction. It should, however, be made plain that whatever plan be agreed upon, the question of the recipients' thrift should not be taken into consideration. There must be no test of this kind imposed, old age and sanity being the only qualifications that should be required for a pension. The cumbrous system adopted in Germany of employer, employé, and the State each contributing a share towards the cost of the pension, involving as it does an elaborate and expensive machinery, is out of the question in this country.

A programme following on these lines should form a broad basis of agreement for the various sections of the democratic forces. It could be made practical in scope, and yet be drawn up so as to contain

the germs of a realisable yet high social and political ideal. The collectivist position which it adopts gives a guide to the policy that should be followed in dealing with individual questions as they arise. It stands for a conscious effort to organise a co-operative commonwealth, through democratic means, to replace the zigzag and contradictory measures which are the results of the labours of the two existing parties. But the measures it advocates to secure its final aim will commend themselves to progressive thinkers not only among the working classes, but also among the other sections of society who are looking for a new departure in politics. On one point alone, if on no other, it should be a means of rallying round it a strong body of support of an intelligent character. That is the declaration in connection with municipal enterprise. At this time there is a great need for a political section to take up a firm attitude towards the attempts which are being made both openly and secretly to place limits upon municipal activity. It has already been mentioned that these attempts are not confined to one side of the House of Commons. It is a distinctly capitalist and individualistic move, irrespective of party and actuated by the desire to curtail the excursions of organised democracy into the hitherto sacred field of private enterprise. We have seen, for instance, how the London County Council has been refused again and again the same rights as have been accorded to third- and fourth-rate

towns ; how recently, as regards provincial cities, the Local Government Board has been trying to check the energies of Councils showing a tendency to progress in a collectivist direction. And this is happening, in spite of the fact that the Report of the Committee on Municipal Trading gives ample evidence of the general benefit to the community which has accrued through collective control. It may be as well to quote here some of the figures given to this Committee by expert witnesses. For instance, upwards of £48,000,000 are invested in municipal water supplies which on the average furnish water to the community at a cheaper rate than similar undertakings in private ownership. The annual nett profit for the five years ended March, 1898, amounted to £1,744,361. The capital of municipally owned gas-works amounts to over £20,000,000, supplying gas at an average of about 6d. per thousand feet cheaper than limited liability companies, and even then making an annual profit of over £1,100,000. Tramways under municipal ownership and working give similar results. Altogether the total amount of capital sunk in reproductive undertakings owned by the community reaches over £88,000,000, giving an average annual nett profit of over £3,600,000. This striking proof of the capacity of the community to carry on industries of a monopolist nature is a most encouraging sign for the future development of collectivist action. And as the evolution of industry is tending towards the creation of further monopolies,

it is of paramount importance not only to the working class but also to the community generally that no check should be placed upon the counter movement of municipalisation. Until a few years ago the progress of collective action was almost unnoticed. Now every vested interest is alive to the fact that it may become the object of attack, and is prepared to defend itself with every weapon it has at its command.<sup>1</sup> Unless the fluid collective feeling is solidified into a definite movement, it is probable that it will be dispersed by the powerful forces which are arraying themselves against it.

Constant watchfulness is also required in order to maintain the standard of wage and general conditions of labour that have already been conceded by the Government and many local administrative bodies, as expressing what the collective conscience considers a decent living minimum that should stand as a pattern for private employers to follow. Experience proves how difficult it is to keep this standard maintained even in the employment of the central Government. The London County Council can only keep its contractors to the terms of their agreement by the utmost care and attention. By the inclusion of the labour clauses in the programme, the trade unionist demands are repre-

<sup>1</sup> There has been recently established, under the name of the Industrial Freedom League, an organisation for the purpose of preventing the extension of municipal enterprise irrespective of its advantages to the community.

sented, and the party would thereby pledge itself to devote the same care in seeing to the carrying out of these conditions as is shown by the Labour Bench at Spring Gardens.

The education proposals, it must be confessed, are not likely to arouse much enthusiasm in the minds of those to whom the party must look for support. The taste for knowledge, gained through study and not simply by experience, has not yet been acquired by the English working class. But a foremost place among the points to be advocated must be an extension and improvement of the educational system. It must, however, be demanded from quite a different standpoint to that usually taken. There is, at the present moment, a multitude of counsellors who are demanding more opportunities for, and a better standard of, mental and technical training, in order that this country may maintain its position as a strong competitor in the world market. But the object that a democratic party must always have in view is not simply the training of good commercial travellers and highly skilled mechanics, important as these may be, but of intelligent and well-informed citizens. It is self-evident that, in spite of thirty years of compulsory education, we have not yet produced these in over-abundant measure. It can be safely left to the ordinary politician to look after the industrial and commercial side of educational work. The democrat must emphasise the necessity of the inculcation of ideas of civic



and personal duties, rights, and responsibilities, and the elements of political and social science. Not until a systematic teaching of these things has been organised and carried out will a democracy, in the true sense of the word, be possible.

If it were proposed to form nothing more than a Labour Party, it would not be necessary to deal in a programme of this kind with anything outside what is known as home politics. But it is not suggested that that should be the case. The party that we are considering would not be limited to the narrow scope of what is generally understood to be the objects of Labour representation. It should aim at the formulation of a programme which would express the democratic view of all vital social and political problems before the country. Even now, a trade union candidate seeking election in the interest of but one section of the working classes cannot escape giving a definite answer to questions which lie outside the purview of the people who are responsible for his candidature. A democratic candidate must have definite opinions and a prepared policy with regard to the affairs of the Empire as well as to those of his parish. If he has none, then it is evident that he has not fitted himself to take up the task of helping to guide the development of the nation. To leave the problems of Imperialism severely alone, or to denounce the word without defining what is being denounced, can no longer be considered a satisfactory democratic attitude. The responsibilities which we have inherited

must be faced, and if the people receive no word of guidance as to how this is to be done, it is not a matter of surprise if they accept a Jingo policy of aggression as one of a wide and lofty patriotism. One of the main points on which politics in the future will turn will be the attitude to be adopted by the mother country towards Greater Britain. Is the vague opinion of the Little Englander—there cannot be said to be a Little England policy—to be accepted as the democratic one? Is the sentiment which undoubtedly animates many of our colonies in favour of the retention of some bond between England and themselves to be ignored and snubbed, or left to be exploited by the reactionary elements? Or should a democratic party at home seek to join hands with similar forces at work in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, and try to build up carefully a democratic Federation of the Empire? To argue that our aim should be to loosen our colonies and dependencies from us as soon as possible is to revive the doctrines of *laissez-faire* which are incompatible with a democratic method of government. A big united democracy is an infinitely more powerful instrument for progress than a number of small ones detached from one another, and so developing antagonisms and rivalries. Some definite policy should be arrived at, having for its ultimate object the establishment of a real Imperial Parliament at Westminster, representing as far as possible the whole of the Empire, with the necessary

devolution of authority in local affairs to local parliaments. This aim would naturally take many years to accomplish, but if held steadily in view would be a means of guidance in questions of an Imperial nature as they arose. There should, also, be a check placed upon expansion by aggressive means, the whole attention of the country in matters of Imperial policy being devoted to the cultivation of the existing resources of the Empire and strengthening the bonds of union.

Our relations to India and other dependencies must also be taken into consideration. If, so far as we can see, our rule in India is producing results that are to be deplored, mere criticism will not supply a remedy. To adopt the Little Englander attitude would, in this case also, be an undemocratic method of dealing with the problem. To leave India, or our other dependencies, would be to give them up to anarchy, or to the mercies of those autocratic Continental powers which are anxiously seeking to widen their dominions. A democratic party must be prepared to carefully consider in what direction the burdens of India can be lightened, how self-government can be increased, and how the natural resources of the land can be developed by the same collectivist policy which is to be applied to home affairs.

In this outline of a basis for a programme of a democratic character, it will be at once noticed that there is nothing new or original. All the points selected have been discussed and demanded during

the last twenty years and more. There is really nothing new to be brought forward. The crying want is for some means of bringing scattered ideas together into one consistent whole, freed from worn-out phrases and conflicting elements. They need arranging in order according to the probability of their attainment. For this to be done requires the sympathetic co-operation of the various sections who believe more or less enthusiastically in all, but are each devoted fanatically to one or more. The land nationaliser must place his contribution towards the solution of social and political questions in relation to those of the more thoroughgoing collectivist and the less theoretical and more practical trade unionist politician; those who are working for political reforms without troubling to consider to what end the means of power they desire to see placed in the hands of the people should be used, must harmonise their action with that of social reformers. This achieved, the main difficulty towards the formation of the party is over.

## CHAPTER V

## TRADE UNIONS AND POLITICAL ACTION

It is evident that a political party endeavouring to unite the working classes must take into account the existing working-class organisations that are striving to improve the social and economic position of the masses, and seek to discover a means of bringing their various aims and methods into harmony. It has already been noticed that the efforts in the direction of forming a political Labour party have taken several forms. There is the socialist section, as represented by the Social Democratic Federation, concentrating its attention more upon an ideal aim than upon immediate questions; the political Labour section, embodied in the Independent Labour party, and several local organisations which combine socialist theory with a programme dealing with practical issues; and the trade union section, which is entering the field of politics in order to defend itself against the attacks that are being made upon trade unionism. It can be seen that the last group has a distinctly narrower point of view than the other two. The socialist and socialist-labour sections have a definite social and

economic theory which forms a guide in dealing with matters of a purely political nature; the trade unionist, on the other hand, outside questions affecting his organisation, may take up either an individualistic or a socialistic attitude without in any way violating his principles. He may be in general agreement with socialists upon the position to be taken up with regard to legislation or existing laws touching trade societies, but may, at the same time, be violently opposed to them on other points. In the past he has generally associated himself with the Liberal party, and has shown no disposition to adopt an independent line. In this connection it may be mentioned that the whole of the present Labour members were recently circularised by an organisation which desired to see the construction of the beginnings of a new democratic party in the House of Commons itself, with the view of obtaining their opinions upon the subject. With but two or three exceptions, they replied that on labour questions pure and simple they always acted together, and on other matters there was no necessity to endeavour to form a party independent of the present Opposition.<sup>1</sup>

If the trade union element in politics were to continue to accept this basis as the correct one, there would be very little to hope for as the result of its action. It would not lead to any new development except, perhaps, the introduction of those sectional trade disputes into St. Stephen's which, up till now,

<sup>1</sup> Annual Report of Battersea Trades and Labour Council, 1901.

have been fought outside. The policy of accepting the crumbs which fall from the table of the two parties when they are sufficiently importuned would be continued.

The situation, however, at the present moment presents new aspects. Trade unionists have been roused into taking part in politics by two causes. First, the permeation of their organisations with socialist ideas, a process which has been going on during the last twenty years; secondly, the recent decisions of the House of Lords with regard to the rights and responsibilities of unions. As these decisions will probably have an important influence in the shaping of the future action of these bodies, it may be as well to state them briefly here. They are the outcome of the attempts made by the employers for a number of years to bring the force of the civil law to bear upon workmen's combinations, the criminal law having failed to touch them to any extent.

The first is known as the Taff Vale decision, the circumstances being as follows :<sup>1</sup>—

On August 20, 1900, Mr. Richard Bell (now M.P.), the General Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, wrote to the General Manager of the Taff Railway Company, supporting the action of the Railway Company's servants in ceasing to work,

<sup>1</sup> The details of these cases are taken from a clearly written article by Mr. Crompton Llewelyn Davies in the *Liberal Magazine*, October, 1901.



and stating that all further negotiations were to be conducted through him. The Company thereupon made arrangements for the engagement of fresh servants, and large numbers of men arrived at Cardiff. These men were met by Mr. Bell and a body of strikers, who asked them whether they wished to be known as "blacklegs," and offered to pay their fares home again. On August 30, an application was made to Mr. Justice Farwell for an injunction against Bell and the Society. At the same time, application was made that the name of the Society should be struck out of the action. Mr. Justice Farwell refused to strike the name of the Society out of the action, and granted an injunction in the following terms:—

"It is ordered that the defendants, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, their servants, agents, and others acting by their authority, be restrained until the trial of this action, or until further order, from watching, or besetting, or causing to be watched or beset, the Great Western Railway Station at Cardiff, or at the works of the plaintiffs, or any of them, or the approaches thereto, or the places of residence, or any places where they may happen to be, of any workman employed by or proposing to work for the plaintiffs, for the purpose of persuading or otherwise preventing persons from working for the plaintiffs, or for any purpose, except merely to obtain or communicate information, and from procuring any persons who have, or may enter into, contracts with the plaintiffs to commit a breach of such contracts."

The Society appealed, and won in the Court of Appeal, when the Master of the Rolls and Lords Justices Collins and Stirling dissolved the injunction against the Society, and ordered its name to be struck out of the action. The case reached the House of Lords in July last. The Lords who heard the appeal, Lord Halsbury, Lord Macnaughten, Lord Shand, Lord Brampton, and Lord Lindley, were unanimous that the decision of the Court of Appeal should be reversed, and that of Mr. Justice Farwell restored. Lord Halsbury contented himself with saying:—

“If the Legislature has created a thing which can own property, which can employ servants, which can inflict injury, it must be taken, I think, to have implicitly given the power to make it suable in a court of law for injuries done by its authority.”

Based upon this judgment, the Taff Vale Company are suing the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants for damages caused through the action of its servants in unlawfully interfering with the employés of the Company by persuading them not to go into work.

The position of trade unions is now perfectly clear. Until now it has been held—and Mr. Frederic Harrison and others who helped in building up their legal status are emphatic upon the point—that trade unions were not subject to the liabilities of corporate bodies. If a secretary or agent committed an unlawful deed, even when acting under the instructions of his organisation, he alone

was legally responsible. Furthermore, picketing, although only lawful since 1875, in so far as attending near or at the house or place where a person resides, works, or carries on a business, or happens to be, or the approach to such house or place in order merely to obtain or communicate information, was yet recognised, to a great extent, as allowing of peaceable persuasion to be used upon those who were going into work. A trade union is now held legally responsible for the doings of its agents, and is liable to be mulcted in heavy damages. Picketing of any value is no longer possible, and accordingly the power of the unions has been crippled in a great degree.

The effect of the first decision is seen in the second, known as the *Quinn v. Leatham* case, settled in August, 1901. Leatham was a butcher, carrying on business at Lisburn, near Belfast. He brought an action against Quinn and four other persons, officers of a trade union called The Belfast Journeymen Butchers' and Assistants' Association, claiming damages for wrongful interference with his business. Quinn, the secretary of this body, wrote to Leatham asking him if it was his intention to continue to employ non-union labour, as if so, his Society would be obliged to take strong measures against him. One of Leatham's customers subsequently received a communication from the Association stating that if he continued to deal with Leatham, the men in his (the customer's) employ would cease to work for him.

The customer immediately telegraphed to Leatham that unless the latter could make some arrangement with the Association he was not to send any more goods. There was no contract between them, so the question of breach of contract did not enter into the case. The action came on at Belfast in July, 1896, and the plaintiff was awarded £200 damages and costs. The defendants appealed, but the appeal was dismissed. The case was then carried to the House of Lords, where the judgment was confirmed.

Hence, as the law now stands, not only in theory but also in practice, a trade union can be financially disabled by legal processes entered into through the new condition of affairs created by these two judgments. We are not at this moment concerned with the ethics of trade union action. It is doubtless true that many of the struggles which have taken place between organised capital and labour have been marked by questionable methods judged from a high moral standpoint. But the fact remains that the unions have played a great part in elevating the condition of the workers, and it is a matter of grave social concern that any hindrance should have been placed in their way. Those skilled trades that are well organised, and can meet the masters on fairly equal terms, may not be seriously affected by the new situation; but the small and still feeble combinations, especially among the unskilled workers, whose weakness compels them to use their influence without a close regard to their legal status, will feel the full

force of the changed condition of things. But even the strong organisations of the skilled artisan are not likely to remain quiet under these checks. The rebuffs to which reference has been made will probably not only heighten the attention that is being given to political action, but will also develop the feeling of working-class solidarity which displays itself in a practical fashion by the federation of trade unions.

The actual results which will follow the action of the unions in definitely entering into politics will depend upon the degree of unity the trade unions can arrive at among themselves. In the past there has been an absence of that element known as "class consciousness" which animates the workers of many European countries, and gives strength to the socialist movement. The history of trade unionism shows many instances of deplorable struggles between different trades over comparatively trifling matters. These disputes have more than outweighed the sympathy and practical help given by one body to another during strikes and lock-outs. Quarrels over technical points in connection with demarcation of work between two similar occupations have done a great deal to damage trade combination in the eyes of the general public, and helped to keep alive the open hostility of employers. These sectional jealousies have also hitherto prevented the formation of a strong system of lasting federation between the different societies. Alliances between groups of trades have been formed, but have fallen through after a

short and troubled existence. The desire of each trade to remain as far as possible perfectly autonomous is also seen in the extremely weak centralised agency which the unions possess. The annual Trade Union Congress is a very slight bond of union, and the Parliamentary Committee elected by the Congress is only a valuable institution when its members happen to be men of initiative and ability. The chief requirement of the trade union movement is a system of alliance which shall be effectively managed by a Committee, with powers much greater than those of the Parliamentary Committee, but at the same time clear and well-defined. An attempt in this direction has been made by the foundation, in June, 1899, of the General Federation of Trade Unions. This organisation was formed for the purpose of providing support to any individual society affiliated from the coffers of the remainder. Each society joining pays a regular contribution per member, and in the case of a strike or lock-out receives a certain amount of financial help in return. This organisation has at the present moment of its existence an affiliated membership of 418,000. The societies that have joined number 77, including large bodies like the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, with over 90,000 members; the Gas Workers and General Labourers with close upon 50,000; the Boot and Shoe Operatives with 28,000; and tiny societies like the Lace Pattern Readers, with 89 members; Hollow Stampers with 75; and

the Pocket-book Makers with 65. The annual income amounts to over £30,000, the expenditure to about £8,000, and the balance in hand to over £62,000. As will be surmised by the comparative lightness of the expenditure, the Federation has been fortunate in not having been engaged through the affiliated societies in any very serious disputes, so its strength and resources have not yet been tried. It cannot yet be gauged whether it will be able to stand the stress a big dispute would involve. The great difficulty in keeping such federations together has always been the tendency on the part of strong societies which have gained a fairly good position for their members, to object after a time to continue to pay towards the cost of the support of weaker bodies engaged in fighting for improved working conditions. The feeling of working-class solidarity is apt, unhappily, to break down under a financial strain.

Moreover, the Federation has secured the allegiance of little more than one-fourth of the organised workers. The powerful Miners' Unions and Federations, the Railway Servants, the Boilermakers, and other big organisations are still outside. It must obtain the support of these before it can meet on anything like equal terms the combination of employers on similar lines that is quietly proceeding throughout nearly every industry. The moment that every large union is united with the Federation, if that consummation is possible, the



necessary central organisation will have been provided. The Trade Union Congress would simply become the annual meeting of delegates from Societies affiliated to the Federation, and its managing Committee would take the place of the present ineffective Parliamentary Committee.

That this achievement is within the bounds of possibility is undoubted. The increase in membership of the Federation during the second year of its existence amounted to over 30,000. This rate of growth, maintained for a few years, would rapidly bring about the end in view.

It is a fact worthy of note that the success of the first steps towards federation coincides with the establishment of the Labour Representation Committee, which acts as a means of uniting those trade societies that are favourable to direct political action. This latter body aims at carrying on a similar work among the unions from a political standpoint, as does the Federation from a purely trade union point of view. The Labour Representation Committee seeks to impress upon the workers that their fundamental interests in politics are identical, while the Federation stands for the same idea with regard to immediate economic interests. The two organisations should supplement each other, and endeavour to inculcate the necessary breadth of view which is essential to a movement that desires to get rid of sectionalism in all its forms. That this will be attempted is fairly certain when we analyse the com-

position of the leading forces in the two organisations. They are, as a rule, represented by men who belong to the advanced wing of the Labour movement which has transformed the majority of unions from old-fashioned individualistic organisations into bodies saturated with collectivist doctrines. It is a promising sign that the prominent personalities in the trade organisations are of a distinctly new type, or rather a reversion to a type of forty years ago, when a school of brilliant unionist leaders existed who looked upon unionism as only one of various means for lifting the workers to a higher plane, and who combined a thorough knowledge of their work as officials of their societies with a degree of statesmanship which was of the greatest value to their followers. To quote the words of Mr. and Mrs. Sydney Webb, "they believed that a levelling down of all political privileges and the opening out of educational and social opportunities to all classes of the community would bring in its train a large measure of economic equality. Under the influence of these leaders, the London unions, and eventually those of the provinces, were drawn into a whole series of political agitations."<sup>1</sup> It is not too much to say that there is promise of a similar development among the foremost men in the modern labour world.

It may therefore be safely assumed that in any future departure in the direction of forming a new democratic party, the trade unions will take no

<sup>1</sup> History of Trade Unionism.

small share. To what extent they should influence the constitution of the party is a question of grave importance. The fact must not be disguised that they will be a narrowing influence in the counsels of a party. The members of a purely political organisation would admit to its membership men of all classes who profess themselves in agreement with its principles. No distinction would be made between the workman and the upper- or middle-class man. On the other hand, a trade society can allow only persons who are working at the particular occupation it represents to enter its ranks. There are, it is true, exceptions to this rule in some of the newer organisations among the unskilled labourers, but this does not affect the point. There is little doubt that this exclusive method would, perhaps unconsciously, tend to display itself among the trade unionist section of a political organisation largely built up from that element. There would probably be an attempt to force upon the party as important principles the decisions of trade societies in support of sectional interests. The narrow view of what constitutes a workman or a labour representative is almost sure to be brought forward, and will give rise to differences which may lead to disunion. In this connection it may be interesting and instructive to refer to certain recent events in the history of the the German Social Democratic party.

It is true that the whole political evolution of that country is entirely different to that in England, but in

nearly all industrial communities similar problems in democracy and the organisation of the masses eventually arise, and the German experience, therefore, cannot be ruled out as altogether irrelevant. There has always been a close, although not a formal, connection between the Social Democratic party and the great majority of trade unions in Germany, many of the officials of the latter bodies being well-known social democrats. The socialist leaders recently came to the conclusion that, on the whole, it would be best for the political and the trade union movements among the masses to proceed, as far as possible, on independent lines. This has given rise to much animated controversy and difference of opinion, the trade unionists inclining towards the maintenance of a firm bond between the two. The problem has arisen in various forms, the latest being a question as to the duty of a social democrat towards his trade society. At Hamburg, where the organised working class is fairly strong, a dispute arose between the master builders and the bricklayers upon the subject of piecework. The majority of the members of the Bricklayers' Union decided against the practice, but a number of dissentients split off from the main body and came to a separate agreement with the employers to work under the old system. The result was that the main body of bricklayers, who, with the dissentients, were members of the local Social Democratic organisation—an extremely powerful body—secured the expulsion of the pieceworking section from the

socialist party as traitors to the principles of the working-class movement. Both parties then appealed to the central committee of the party, who decided that the bricklayers who had agreed to work piece-work had not violated the principles of the party, and therefore should not have been expelled. The local socialist body at Hamburg appealed from this decision to the Annual Congress of the whole party at Lubeck, which gathering practically confirmed the view expressed by the Central Committee, but at the same time agreed that the local organisation should endeavour to come to some agreement with the excluded section. With the development of trade unionism, which has been making rapid strides in Germany, instances of this kind are bound to occur, and they will require skilful handling if the harmonious relations existing between the various democratic forces are to be maintained.

There is also springing up among the German working-class socialists a new interpretation of "class consciousness," which puts a narrower construction upon it than has been the case in the past. This expresses itself in a tendency to limit the choice of democratic representatives to so-called *bonâ-fide* working men, and not to select, as heretofore, candidates for the Reichstag or other legislative and administrative bodies on the score of their ability and integrity, irrespective of the class to which they belong. The objection to the "*Akademiker*," as the more educated leaders are called, who endeavour to hold a broad

view of the political problems with which the party has to deal, is liable to increase, and in so doing may seriously threaten that unity which has been the striking feature of the German Democratic movement.<sup>1</sup>

If such differences arise in Germany, where the pressure from above keeps alive the paramount importance of sinking minor points of disagreement, and sacrificing individual or sectional prejudices for the sake of the solidarity of the democratic movement, they are not likely to remain absent from a democratic political movement in England, where political and social freedom gives greater opportunities for the play of personal and sectional antagonisms and other disruptive influences. The multitudinous points in industrial organisation on which disputes between two or more trade organisations can and have arisen would soon shatter to pieces any political party into which they were imported. A tiny quarrel over the line to be drawn between the work of a smith and that of an engineer caused the Amalgamated Society of Engineers to withdraw from the Trade Union Congress. Transfer such quarrels to the field of political organisation, and all possibility of permanent unity and harmonious action would disappear.

Another point that would probably give rise to difficulties would be the position of representatives

<sup>1</sup> The *Protokoll* of the Annual Congress of the German Social Democratic party, Lubeck, 1901, gives other instances of the difficulties that arise through the close connection of trade unionism, *per se*, with political organisation.

of a democratic party elected to Parliament, or to local administrative authorities. The trade union view of such persons is generally that they are little more than delegates, who have nothing else to do than register the opinions and desires of the majority of those they represent. This conception of representation would make it impossible for men of ability, individuality, and initiative to accept positions of responsibility, hampered, as they would be, with instruction on matters upon which their supporters would have had little or no opportunity to obtain the information required in order to arrive at a wise decision. The essence of democratic representation is not contained in this system of trade union delegateship, where hard-and-fast rules bind the action of those elected to office. It cannot be imported into political organisation without destroying the fundamental requirement of democracy—the selection of men who are bound by certain principles, but left free to apply those principles, guided by special knowledge, in the manner best calculated to produce the highest results. The trade unions would be prone to look upon the parliamentary and municipal representative as a counterpart, in another sphere, of his general secretary or the members of his Executive Committee. An elected Labour leader would be popular with his adherents in so far as he submitted himself to the requirements of this view, and unpopular in so far as he took up the truly representative position of acting



in questions of policy upon his own judgment, or that of his elected colleagues who belong to the same party as himself.

It is perhaps in the field of municipal administration that the most dangerous tendencies that can arise from the entrance of unclarified trades unionist ideas into politics may show themselves. It would be comparatively easy—in fact, it has already been done in two districts—for a combined trade unionist and socialist party to capture the local government of a town or city. To the convinced collectivist who is elected under such conditions, this would mean the securing of a splendid opportunity to put into practice the theories which have inspired his political activity. He would help forward all efforts to secure the widening of municipal enterprise, the municipalisation of monopolies, and the extension in every direction of the principle of the direct employment of labour by the community. He would advocate and secure better conditions for the workers so employed, and insist upon quality of work being considered as well as quantity. The trade unionist county or town councillor, on the other hand, would pay more attention to seeing that the letter as well as the spirit of the rules and regulations of his trade society were carried out by the municipality as employer; he would be prone to take under his protection employés who are reprimanded for breaches of necessary discipline, or who are discharged for good reason. He would be inclined to fight for the interests of those engaged in

his particular calling, regardless of the general welfare of the community of whose communal interests he is a guardian. In this way that subtle spirit of Tanmanyism, which is fatal to democratic progress, could be introduced into municipal life. That this is no mere suppositism of evil is proved by the history of the Labour party in West Ham. According to a socialist councillor of that town, the result of the working of a Labour majority on the Municipal Council was anything but satisfactory. The party was built up by a fusion between the Social Democratic Federation, the Independent Labour party, and the trade unions. It remained in power sufficiently long to begin several valuable collectivist experiments, but not long enough to bring them to completion. Its defeat was brought about by disorganisation, disunion, and a painful incapacity on the part of most of the representatives to cope with the task they had undertaken. The story of the collapse was told at Glasgow at the Congress of Socialist and Labour elected persons held in 1899. It appeared from the words of the socialist councillor already referred to, who spoke upon the difficulties of a Labour majority, that the employés of the town council considered that the civic representatives were little more than their delegates; that, whatever their demands in the shape of wages and conditions of labour might be, they ought at once to be complied with; that it was almost impossible to maintain discipline among the employés, and should any councillor refuse to stand between a justly

punished workman and his superiors, the councillor's or the workman's trade union at once brought such pressure to bear as was little short of corrupt. Besides this, the three sections of the Council's majority were generally quarrelling among themselves as to the policy which should be pursued, or wasting time over insignificant points of administration that were being constantly magnified into questions of principle. The narrow Labour view ultimately succeeded in bringing defeat at the polls, which left the various factions more bitter towards each other than ever.

This experience is fruitful of warnings. It shows that no matter how much education the average workman receives through his trade union training, he is unable as yet to take up the *rôle* of legislator and administrator. A Labour section in a minority on a public body can carry on useful work in securing for the direct servants of the community something like decent conditions of labour, reasonable hours of work, and fair wages. But when it becomes the majority, it finds a difficulty in dropping the character of agitator, and becoming the employer and responsible manager of communal concerns. It can attain this point of view only in so far as it forgets the trade union attitude, which is to fight for sectional interests alone, and takes up that of the collectivist, who has an end in view far beyond the ideal of trade unionism.

It will, therefore, be the duty of the Democratic party to prevent the purely trade union section newly interested in political action from capturing it for the

purpose of promoting sectional interests at the expense of general progress. It should range itself on the side of the unions when they appear, as at present, to be placed in a position of legal difficulty. But it should endeavour to keep matters of trade union detail outside the scope of its business. The formation of two definite trade union federations, one to identify itself with political matters and the other with trade disputes and the like, may help to make the task easier. It is obvious that the problem of securing harmony will be difficult to solve. But at the same time it will become clear that as the masses begin to assume political responsibility they must adjust their existing organisations to the new circumstances. If the trade organisations seriously enter national and Imperial politics, and seek to take up a direct share in government, they will find that they must do more than simply represent a demand for shorter hours of labour and higher wages. If they throw on one side the clumsy weapon of the strike, and adopt the more delicate and complex methods of political action, they must change their point of view at the same time. Otherwise they will create nothing but confusion.

## CHAPTER VI

## CO-OPERATION AND POLITICS

MRS. SYDNEY WEBB, in her work entitled "The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain," says: "The gathering together of the whole working class in a Co-operative Union on the one hand, and in a Federation of Trade Unions on the other, would make the workers practically paramount in the State." This statement is beyond dispute. When the two organisations had reached this stage, a combination of both for political purposes would be powerful enough to secure for the masses a direct controlling hand upon the Government of the country. But before this stage is reached there is much to be gained by their unified action in the sphere of politics. How such action can be arrived at is a question of some difficulty. The two movements have not always been able to progress amicably together in the past. Even at the last Trade Union Congress (1901), complaints were brought against Co-operative Societies on the ground that they sanctioned what were considered to be sweating conditions in connection with their business, and

the denunciations uttered against such practices were couched in terms which were scarcely calculated to improve the relations between the trade unionists and the co-operators. But making every allowance for this ebullition of temper, the situation is at the present moment more favourable than ever before to the creation of a good understanding. During the last ten years we have seen Co-operative Societies subscribing to the support of miners on strike, and to locked-out engineers. The tendency in the direction of the complete recognition of trade union conditions is developing every day, and the cases of under-payment and bad treatment are becoming less. The orthodox socialist, however, still views the Co-operative movement unsympathetically, if not with actual hostility, refusing to recognise the latent possibilities it contains, in common with trade unionism, for rendering assistance in the formation of a new democratic party. It is true that here and there may be found local arrangements between socialists, co-operators, and trade unionists for municipal election purposes, but they are not general. The Co-operative movement, as a whole, is not yet inclined to take part in political work, contenting itself with the organisation of distribution and production on democratic lines.

Although the present position of Co-operation in no way approaches the great universal association of the working classes that should be its ultimate aim, the movement shows an extremely healthy growth.

In 1902, the registered distributive societies contained 1,919,555 members, who possessed capital to the extent of £24,595,706, with a trading account of close upon £82,000,000 and a profit of £9,099,412. This wonderful result of working-class organisation is one of the most encouraging signs for the future of democracy. But the chief value of Co-operation will only become clear when it falls into line with other democratic movements. For it merely to remain a means whereby the thrifty working class can save money by a convenient method would be to stultify the movement.

The importance of securing some definite relation between Co-operation and the democratic political movement, on similar lines to those sketched out in connection with trade unionism, will be easily perceived when we examine the work carried on by co-operators. It has already been pointed out that the most striking activity in connection with progressive development during the last twenty years has been in the sphere of municipal collectivism. We have experienced an ever-increasing tendency for the municipality to enlarge the scope of its work, and to encroach more and more upon that of private enterprise. The chief conscious supporters and promoters of this development are the members of the Labour movement who support political action. But the extension of communal management and control of industry requires the services of men who have had some training in the task of administration. Under



present social conditions, opportunities for such training are almost the monopoly of those classes which, in the main, most strongly object to the widening of the area of collectivist enterprise. Hence democracy is hampered through want of educated capacity to follow up and consolidate its civic progress. In two schools only can the working class find the means of becoming possessed of some portion of that knowledge of men and affairs that is necessary for municipal or national statesmanship. They are the Trade Union and the Co-operative Society. Of the two, the Co-operative Society provides the most valuable experience. There the problems of the organisation of labour, the detailed methods of administration, have to be faced and mastered. The successful exercise of responsibility undertaken on behalf of a movement of this nature begets the business habits and the foresight which must be the equipment of the successful municipal administrator. Especially is this so in the management of the growing productive co-operative societies, where the labour employed requires skilful handling by the best organising talent. Transfer such talent in part to the sphere of political organisation and action, and the gain to a constructive democratic movement would be immense.

This transference could take place through the affiliation, in either a direct or indirect form, of co-operative societies with the Labour Representation Committee which has been referred to previously.

That this is not an impossible step may be judged from the fact that the question as to whether the Co-operative movement shall definitely enter into politics has already been under discussion, and although the decision has not yet been favourable, it is not unlikely that it will ultimately be of an affirmative character. The members of co-operative societies are in many, if not in the majority of, cases, also trade unionists, and the spreading feeling amongst the latter in favour of political action cannot but have an effect upon the sister movement.

The growing recognition of the fact that all sections of the Labour and Democratic movement supplement each other, and—if an understanding is arrived at—can help towards realising a common aim, may tend to hasten the entrance of co-operators, as such, into the political arena.

On the financial side this step would render enormous assistance to a democratic party. If co-operators set themselves earnestly to the task of securing representation in the House of Commons, a small percentage of the annual profits could be allotted to a fund for parliamentary purposes. It would not be a very revolutionary measure to extend the principle of giving monetary aid from Co-operative profits to trade unionists on strike to the voting of sums from the same source to defray the expenses of elections or the payment of parliamentary and municipal representatives. It is true that the older leaders who have done magnificent

work in building up Co-operative organisation in the past have opposed, and would in the future, oppose the idea of using the societies' funds for such purposes; but the younger men who see in the Co-operative movement a model on a tiny scale of what the whole of industry shall one day become through the universal application of its underlying principles, should eventually succeed in their endeavour to widen the influence of the movement by giving it a new direction. By subscribing to a democratic political fund which would be used for the benefit of the workers, the Co-operative movement would simply be doing what every great interest in the country considers itself entitled to do either directly or indirectly, in order to obtain for its own ends a share in directing the politics of the nation.

Should this step be taken, it would only mean the adoption of a new and powerful method of carrying out the real object of Co-operation, which is not the securing of dividends, but the emancipation of the workers from the thralldom of capital. In so far as it has gone, the movement has shown that the middleman, as profit-maker, is an unnecessary factor in distribution, and that production can be carried out by democratic methods and on voluntary lines without the help of the great capitalist, either as organiser or as the medium of financial support. But as pointed out by Mrs. Sydney Webb, Co-operation on voluntary lines cannot be extended indefinitely. It would be impossible to carry on all

industries or trade organisations through government by consumers or customers. Local and national monopolies would not be democratically controlled if they were managed solely by those persons who worked them or bought their products or paid for using them. Such institutions as gas and water supplies, tramway systems, railroads, canals, and the like, which supply what are practically universal wants, must, in the very nature of things, under a democratic order, be controlled by the whole community. Although this is now nothing more than a truism, curious heresies on these points still arise, and we hear the word collectivism occasionally associated with schemes for miners to own the mines, railway servants the railways, and other propositions of a similar nature, especially when the question of collective control is confused by the introduction of profit-sharing, or other bastard forms of co-operation.

In the work of transferring monopolies from private to public ownership, the true co-operator should render no small service. He holds the ideal of a co-operative commonwealth, in which every one shall have a due share in the work and pleasure of life. While he has been consciously struggling towards the goal, the people, often unconsciously, have been actively engaged in working towards the same end through the medium of the municipality and the State. The capital possessed by co-operators is but little more than £24,500,000; the property owned and administered by municipalities in England amounts

to probably more than four hundred millions. Now that the masses are becoming aware of the existence of this collective property of theirs, they are striving to gain a footing on its boards of administration for the purpose of putting the principles of Co-operation into force in a new and much wider area. In this task the experience and ability of the co-operator is urgently wanted, and would be eagerly welcomed.

The recognition of the importance of the Co-operative movement as an integral portion of the general democratic forces has gained ground in nearly all advanced countries on the Continent. Even in Germany, where orthodox Social Democracy is the most powerful influence among the masses, and where, until a few years ago, the uselessness of any other form of activity, excepting that devoted to achieving political power, was a cardinal point of faith with working-class leaders, the success of voluntary co-operation has practically compelled the Social Democratic party to admit its value as a factor in improving not only the material but also the intellectual condition of the working class. Until quite recently the orthodox Marxist looked upon it as heretical for anyone claiming to be a socialist to engage in the work of spreading ideas in favour of voluntary co-operation, on the ground that the minds of the people were thus diverted from the only way of obtaining the economic and political freedom which is the aim of social democracy. It was prophesied that all attempts to bring about

permanent social improvement within the ranks of the proletariat until a social revolution had taken place would fail hopelessly. But finding that the results they had anticipated did not occur, but, on the contrary, that the societies founded to promote co-operation flourished exceedingly, the Social Democrats wisely reviewed their attitude towards such organisations, and decided that the workers should be recommended to join them.<sup>1</sup> Many prominent co-operators in Germany are now also leading members of the Social Democratic party, and by their presence in both branches of the working-class movement, keep intact the solidarity of the German democratic forces, which is in striking contrast to the dissensions existing in those of this country.

The same experience is to be found in Belgium, where the Socialist leader, M. Anseele, is also the most noted co-operator. In spite of difficulties, unknown in England, powerful societies which have shown remarkable results have been built up. It may be said, both with regard to Belgium and Germany, that in those towns where the political working-class movement is strong, there will also be found flourishing co-operative organisations.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "At the Hanover Party Conference (1899) it was recognised that through Co-operation it was possible to achieve a considerable improvement in the position of the working classes. More important still, the party saw in the Co-operative movement a means of educating the working classes."—"Die Genossenschaftsbewegung," by Adolph von Elm, Socialist member of the Reichstag.

<sup>2</sup> The Co-operative movement in Belgium is so well known that there is no need to quote figures in support of this statement. It

The intimate, although unofficial, connection between the political and the trade union movement in Germany, which has already been referred to, together with the growing interest displayed by the leaders of both in the work of co-operation, makes it possible for the proper boundaries and value to be placed upon the work of each of the three sections of working-class activity. In England the tendency which has shown itself in the past for working-class political organisation, co-operation, and trade unionism, to develop apart, and for each to arrogate to itself the capacity to cure social problems, must be beaten down. In order to make a democratic party a living reality, the influence of such narrow sectional ideas must be swept entirely away. The working-class democrat must be brought to recognise that it will not be possible for the highest results to be obtained in one alone of these three fields of work, but in participation in all three. The success of Co-operation, for instance, in its efforts to raise the standard of life of those employed to produce or handle the products in which it deals, depends largely upon the power of trade unions to check the competition of badly-paid adult labour, and upon the legislature to prevent that of

is interesting, however, to notice how German Co-operation has developed in the following towns, in every one of which the Social Democrats have a strong footing :—Breslau has societies with 73,000 members, Leipzig-platwitz 25,000, Stettin 20,000, Dresden 19,000, Stuttgart 18,000, Magdeburg 17,000, Gorlitz 15,000, Bremen 11,000, etc. Breslau, Leipzig, Magdeburg, Dresden, and Stuttgart are represented in the Reichstag by Social Democrats. The total number of co-operators in Germany is estimated to be about one million, and is growing rapidly.



child labour. This is only one instance of the underlying dependence of Co-operation upon forces outside itself with which it must work in order to secure a greater measure of progress, and to give its fullest contribution to the solution of social and economic questions.

## CHAPTER VII

## DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP

THE most urgent problem in connection with the organisation of the new forces in politics is that of leadership. While co-operation and trade unionism have had at command men whose devotion, energy, patience, and zeal have built up those movements, working-class political organisation has failed to attract permanently to its service men with the requisite quality of dogged persistence combined with organising capacity, in spite of the fact that political agitators and educationists have arisen in no small number during the last twenty years. Some of these have played, and a few still play, a prominent part in public life; but the work even of these few has been either of a spasmodic or local character. The others have dropped out of the ranks through failing to possess ability beyond that of the demagogic agitator, or through disappointment at the slight response made to their efforts. Where limited capacity and disappointment have not hitherto prevented the development of an influential political party, jealousy

and suspicion have helped to disrupt and destroy whatever appearance of solidarity had been built up by years of work. The result is that the new democracy as an ideal is not embodied in a party but in a number of sects, each having many points of agreement with the rest, but all differing on certain matters relating either to questions of personality, theory, or policy of far less vital importance than those upon which there is no disagreement. Purely personal differences between well-known political "Labour Leaders" have been so deep-rooted and disastrous in their effects, that there is an ever-recurring topic of discussion among their supporters as to whether it would not be possible to secure democratic union by getting rid of leaders and leadership altogether.<sup>1</sup>

The essence of leadership in a progressive political movement is the power of maintaining unity in action, and reasoned discipline among men working for the same end, but varying in temperament, whose opinions as to policy and tactics are formed upon different degrees of knowledge and experience. A leader in a democratic party, in order to exercise this power of securing unified action, must possess the confidence of the various elements that compose it. Owing to the past misunderstandings between old and new trade unionists, between both these and co-operators, and between all three with the exponents of

<sup>1</sup> See a curious and futile discussion during January, February, and March, 1902, in the *Clarion* newspaper upon Socialist Unity and Leadership.

political action, the number of prominent men who possess this general confidence is comparatively small.<sup>1</sup> Many of the miners' representatives in the House of Commons, for instance, would not arouse enthusiasm as parliamentary candidates in constituencies strongly impregnated with the ideas of the Independent Labour party, while an advocate of collectivism as such would find little support among the strongly

<sup>1</sup> Of the Labour members in the House of Commons, Mr. John Burns is probably the only man who would be able to combine the various elements into one united party. He has not only extraordinary natural capacity as an organiser and agitator, but his fourteen years' experience as administrator upon the London County Council, the most exacting school of municipal statesmanship, and his ten years' service in Parliament, combined with his wide and deep knowledge of the working classes and the Labour movement in all its phases, render him eminently fitted to lead a new departure. He has the confidence of all sections of the organised workers, except perhaps that of the small and extreme coteries in the Social Democratic Federation. The trade unionists and co-operators would, without doubt, join any national movement to which he attached himself, while the Independent Labour party would welcome his help and guidance, as evidenced by the fact that Mr. Keir Hardie, whose devotion to the cause of the workers has given him an increasingly strong position in political life, stated at the conference of the party in 1901 that he looked to Mr. Burns to take the initiative in forming a definite Labour group in the House of Commons. Mr. Burns, however, has up till now declined to take any steps towards forming, or assisting to form, a new party, in spite of many invitations to do so, preferring to work alone. By so doing he has undoubtedly performed an enormous amount of administrative and legislative drudgery of the most valuable kind, but it is open to question whether, by concentrating himself upon tasks which could be carried out by less able and powerful personalities, he has adopted the most fruitful field for the exercise of his great energy and abilities.

individualistic miners of Northumberland and Durham. Even the late Mr. James Mawdsley, General Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Cotton Spinners, and one of the most able and trusted of trade unionist organisers, was unable to secure sufficient support from the workers engaged in the cotton industry to obtain a seat in Parliament, owing to the cross currents in the various sections of the Labour movement, although he was backed by one of the great parties.

The task, therefore, of those who set out to build up a democratic party by bringing into line the members of trade unions, co-operative societies, and of existing advanced political organisations, is one requiring ability of no mean order. To allay distrust and friction between the various elements will need the tactful handling of the differences that arise between them. The settlement of a definite line of action will require the nicest discrimination and most delicate judgment, otherwise the attempt will break down in its earliest stages. To solidify the party, there must be the capacity to deal swiftly and skillfully with the details of organisation, and the power to arouse in others a well-ordered and devoted activity in the service of the movement. In the shaping of a policy and programme there must be a thorough knowledge of social, economic, and political problems, together with the ability to make them clear to the popular mind.

How all these qualities are to be continuously

devoted to the political re-organisation of the people is a problem that can only be solved in one way. The masses must learn that just as it is absolutely necessary to secure the services of paid organisers, secretaries and executive officers for their trade unions, and salaried managers and servants to conduct the business of co-operative societies, so is the payment of political services equally indispensable in order to attain success. To this necessity the workers are slowly becoming conscious; but their idea of payment for political work seems as yet to be limited to the provision of salaries for representatives in the House of Commons, and upon important administrative bodies. They have not fully grasped the fact that to build up a political organisation of a permanent character, strong enough to contest elections with any hope of success, will demand the whole time and energy of trained men. One of the first matters to which a democratic political body must give its attention, even before it attempts to raise money for the payment of members of Parliament, is the establishment of national and local funds for the support of national and local organisers and propagandists. The prejudice against "paid agitators" and "professional politicians," which exists as strongly among the working class as in any other, must be broken down. The workman must be made to realise that, as his trade union is held together and strengthened mainly by the uninterrupted and persistent use of the organising capacity of permanent officials, so must democratic

political machinery have its district and general agents and secretaries fully equipped and able to give themselves wholly to its service. Until this elementary lesson has been thoroughly learned, there will be simply a continuation of the spasmodic efforts to form a new party by contesting parliamentary seats without any preparation beyond a few weeks' campaigning before the date of the election—a policy in nearly every case doomed to failure, but at present the only one practicable, owing to the reliance still placed by enthusiastic democrats upon unskilled and necessarily intermittent voluntary effort.

If the need of recompense for political work is recognised and met, there is no reason to doubt that the class which has produced the leaders of trade unionism and co-operation will be able to find in these days of wider education the talent required. But while the earnest and thoughtful men among the workers, the potential John Brights and Richard Cobdens of the masses, are compelled to give the best part of their physical and mental capacity to the task of securing a livelihood, the position is a hopeless one. For local organising, there are many men now striving in their spare moments to keep alive a small and feeble spirit of reform, who, if relieved of the anxiety of securing their daily bread, would increase tenfold the value of their services to the democratic forces of the districts in which they live. In a large number of the industrial towns in England there are now representatives upon the local authorities, inde-



pendent of both Liberalism and Conservatism, who, having served an apprenticeship in public life, and proved their honesty and capacity, have won not only the confidence of the intelligent workers, but also the respect and support of the sympathetic and broad-minded of the middle class. If the ablest of these were taken from the workshop, factory or office, and given the opportunity of combining their duties as town or district councillors with those of paid political organisers, the formation of a really effective democratic element would be possible.

The scope of the labours of an organiser placed in this position would be very wide. It would not be sufficient for him to act merely as the counterpart of the ordinary Liberal or Conservative registration or election agent, carrying out what are little more than mechanical duties. He would have to combine such work with that of solidifying and inspiring the local democratic spirit, keeping it vigorous and undivided by the tactful adjustment of the differences—*Kinderkrankheiten*—that always arise in the beginnings of advanced movements. Furthermore, in order to maintain the reputation of his party as a body of practical and constructive reformers, he would have to equip himself as a specialist upon all questions of local administration, make himself a master of the municipal problems of the city, town, or district in which he lived, and grasp every opportunity that presented itself of being the exponent of the views of his party upon the solution of those problems.

Besides this, he would have to keep his knowledge of economics and political and social questions up to date. In so far as the services of men capable of undertaking these responsibilities can be secured will the democratic forces be able to exercise influence over the life and thought of industrial centres.<sup>1</sup>

For propaganda and organisation on national lines, men who have made their mark locally through their special ability should be selected. It might at first be advisable and expedient to combine the office of member of the House of Commons with that of general agitator, as it is certain that the most eloquent and persuasive speakers would be elected soonest to that body. But as the party developed, it would be found imperative that the elected person, as already pointed out, should devote himself almost exclusively to St. Stephen's, and that the outside work should be carried on by others. For the purpose of creating an impression in the country that a democratic party is in existence, and is a force to be reckoned with in politics, its elected representatives must have the opportunity of giving their whole attention to parliamentary business. Experience shows that it is impossible for one man, except under extraordinary circumstances, to combine the drudgery of continuous

<sup>1</sup> Two striking instances of the success of this method in practice can be seen in the position of the Independent Labour party at Bradford and at Halifax, where the party has secured the services of permanent paid organisers of ability, who have devoted themselves with striking results to a course of action similar to that here sketched out.

agitation with the labour of earning a reputation as a useful parliamentarian.

The scope of thorough national organisation and propaganda would include the founding of branch societies in every district where favourable signs existed; of spreading systematically political education among the masses by meetings and lectures; by the publication of books, pamphlets, and the issuing of a national party journal. This would require the service of a number of experienced, educated, and salaried men and women, who should be elected periodically by a national conference of delegates from the local organisations, or by a committee appointed from the conference.<sup>1</sup> The local organisations should have the right of the final selection of their own organisers and officers. To ensure continuity and consistency in the work of national organisation, there should be no rule set up limiting the term of service of officers. The tests of efficiency and honesty should be the only ones applied to candidates, and no system of rotation of officers or the like should debar a man who has displayed both these qualities in his record in connection with the party. This view is such an obviously common-sense one that the matter would scarcely require mentioning, but that English working-class

<sup>1</sup> An extension of the Hutchinson Trust Lectures as carried out by the Fabian Society, and a large increase in the number of "Clarion Van" lectures, would embody an effective form of popular political education.

political movements have so often suffered from a morbidly nervous fear of the results of allowing officials, whether paid or unpaid, to retain their positions for a lengthy period. There is an idea current among many well-intentioned people that it is undemocratic for any one man, no matter how able and self-sacrificing he may be, or how successfully he may have conducted the business of his organisation, to continue long in the same office. This prejudice, founded on a vague distrust of leaders and officials generally, has very little basis in reason or experience. It is quite clear that it is to the advantage of any movement—and indeed it is recognised in most—to retain persons of special capacity in the post in which they render the best service. The dangers of mechanical wire-pulling, of cliquism, and the development of the “boss”—the bugbear of democracy—can always be checked both locally and nationally in an organisation run on democratic lines, by means of frequent gatherings of the rank and file, or of delegates appointed by them. Providing a healthy and intelligent interest is displayed by the majority of individuals composing it, any body of men can keep themselves free from the risk of being used for purely personal or corrupt ends, or from being made the tools of selfish ambition. The organisation will be under their control, and the acts of its leaders will be subject to their approval in so far as they are alert, and take an active share in its responsibilities and financial support.

The direct payment of political services outside

those rendered by representatives elected to public bodies has been objected to, on the ground that it would be turning such work into mere "business," and would attract men simply through the money value offered; and further, that the invaluable enthusiasm of the volunteer worker would be gradually lost. In reply to these objections, it can be urged that it is absolutely necessary that the work of political organising should be made a business, just as the work of trade union organisation has developed into a profession. It is the absence of "business methods" that has prevented the growth of a strong and united democratic element in many districts where there were signs a few years ago of the possibility of a flourishing organisation being built up. For instance, the dull labour of perfecting the register, a task which is never neglected by the orthodox political parties, must of necessity be carried on so as to secure or maintain electoral victories. This cannot be efficiently done except by the employment of an agent, versed in the technicalities of the registration law, for at least three months during the year; and during that period it would be necessary for him to give the whole of his time to the task. It is clear that, except in very rare cases, this would mean the expenditure of money which, if sufficient in amount, could be used to provide a salary for a permanent local organiser, whose duties have already been suggested, and would include those involved in securing a reliable register of voters.

It by no means follows that a system of this kind would in a democratic political movement involve the ascendancy of the place-hunter and office-seeker. Judging from the experience of the past, especially in relation to trade unionism, a democratic national or local committee, before selecting a man for office, would not only require evidence of fitness and sound credentials of high personal character, but also a record of unpaid service to the movement as an indication of sincerity. If we consider the history of trade unions and friendly societies, it cannot be said that these bodies have been, on the whole, either hasty or unwise in the selection of their leaders, and it may be inferred that when the same methods of organisation are adopted in the sphere of politics, equally good results will follow. Further, it is not proposed that the high standard of capacity required should receive its market price if it were used in a commercial direction. The salaries should, it is suggested, be little, if anything, above a living wage—enough for the enthusiast, but insufficient to draw those whose chief object in attaching themselves to the movement might be to obtain easily the means to a comfortable existence. Further, instead of the voluntary work of public-spirited individuals being withdrawn, it is safe to expect that by the appointment of responsible officials such work would be so organised as to make it infinitely more valuable and reliable than at present. An enormous amount of energy and

capacity is now running to waste in advanced political movements owing to the absence of proper direction.

There should be little difficulty in raising the funds required to carry out a scheme of this kind. It would only need an extension of the system which is being rapidly introduced into nearly all trade unions, of raising a certain sum every year by means of a special levy for parliamentary election purposes, making it broad enough to include provision for the cost of keeping political organisation alive and active, as well as for the payment of representatives on legislative and administrative bodies.<sup>1</sup> A certain amount of the sum realised (which should be also contributed to by political and co-operative societies affiliated to a joint body) could be allocated to those districts in which a strong local democratic organisation was in existence, and where a man had made a reputation as a capable local administrator and leader. This could be supplemented by sums collected on the spot. For national purposes, the disbursements could be managed from the centre. It is certain that some such method as the one here indicated will be adopted when the organised workers—especially the trade unionists—who are now eagerly demanding direct parliamentary representation become aware, as they

<sup>1</sup> The number of trade unionists, including the members of the Miners' Federation, who have agreed to levy themselves for political purposes is now (May, 1902) about 600,000. The sum raised would amount to about £30,000 per annum.



soon will, that to succeed in their object it is not sufficient to raise large political funds and let them accumulate until the eve of an election, and then bring forward candidates, hoping by a hasty appeal to the masses to secure their return on the strength of the word "Labour." They will be compelled to recognise that not only must constituencies, even where they are overwhelmingly working-class, be educated and organised by a long course of persistent work before a contest takes place, but that the men who stand in the name of democracy and labour must be prepared by experience and training also. There are practically no constituencies outside the few purely mining districts where a man can count upon his return to Parliament simply as an official or well-known member of the trade union in his particular occupation. Generally speaking, he can only command the support needful for success through his all-round knowledge and tried ability as a man of affairs—qualities which he can acquire thoroughly only by concentrated effort even when he is able to devote the whole of his time to that object. Hence to him an apprenticeship in political work is of paramount importance, although he may possess a natural talent of an uncommon order for such work.

While considering it to be of vital importance to the future of democracy that the workers themselves should establish some means whereby men of their own class could be given the opportunity of taking

part with effect in the spheres of legislation and administration, it has not been forgotten that the end to be sought is not the formation of a Labour party, in the narrow sense of the word "Labour," but one that should broadly represent the principles of the New Democracy as a whole. In a movement working for this aim there would be room for men of all classes who were sincere in their desire to serve it; for it is but stating a truism to say that in the political development of democracy, there is absolute need for co-operation between the practical common-sense of the artisan, the business capacity of the middle-class man, the theoretical knowledge of the student, and the insight of the experienced statesman. There is little doubt that there will always be, as there always has been, a select few among the upper and middle ranks of society, who, rising superior to the prejudices and education of their class, and actuated by a profound dissatisfaction with existing conditions, will be anxious to use their intellects, culture, and knowledge for the political and social elevation of the masses. In the past such men have been welcomed and trustingly followed by those whom they desired to help; occasionally they have secured a far greater measure of loyalty and confidence than that accorded to leaders who, by sheer force of character, have risen out of the common level of the people. Therefore, the expectation that the field of democratic endeavour will remain open to recruits from above is not unwarranted, in spite of

the tendency to restrict the scope and meaning of the new political forces which has been referred to in a previous chapter.

This tendency is one that can be easily understood. It arises from the belief that is slowly dawning among the masses with the advance of education—a belief undeniably true—that they alone can work out their political and social salvation. Help in this struggle can be rendered by men outside their ranks, but the full brunt of the fight must be borne by themselves. With the growing appreciation of this fact they will be compelled to find among themselves the men whom they must look to for guidance and leadership; men who are of their order, who know their needs and sufferings, their joys and sorrows, their strength and weakness, their temptations and follies, their virtues and vices; men who, while knowing and experiencing all these things, have risen superior to their surroundings through the advantage of inherent capacity. Such men as these are to be found in every grade of the working classes. Let them have the opportunity of serving their class by combining their practical knowledge and experience of its problems with the intellectual equipment necessary for their solution; let them have the same chance of learning the art and science of politics and political organisation as the young men of other classes, and it will not be long before a new and efficient type of democratic leader and statesman will be evolved. There is no absence of

brains among the masses ; it is not the want of potential intelligence among the people that is the cause of their political inertness. It is the want of some means of thoroughly rousing latent faculties ; the absence of the training of brains to think and to act ; and, above all, the absence of efficient organisation of the roused intelligences and thinking brains that are already in existence. The masses themselves must provide the remedy for this. To sit down and wait for the coming of a heaven-sent genius who, without demanding sacrifices from the people in return, will remove their burdens and lead them into a new order, where the law of liberty, equality, and fraternity shall reign supreme, is the policy of idle dreamers, but not of men worthy of a brighter future.

THE END





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